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PLATO'S
CONCEPTION OF PHILOSOPHY

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PLATO'S
CONCEPTION OF
PHILOSOPHY

BY

H. GAUSS, PH.D.

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MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
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1937

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TO
DR CLEMENT C. J. WEBB

FOREWORD

It is with much pleasure that I write a few lines of introduction to Dr. Gauss's volume. Throughout the nineteenth century British and German scholars both did much for the interpretation of the greatest of the ancient philosophers, though the students of each nation, naturally enough, had their own characteristic point of view. With us, perhaps, owing largely to the traditional Platonism of the Anglican theology, interest centred chiefly in Plato as a great religious teacher and moral reformer, a little to the neglect of Plato as a systematic metaphysician, epistemologist and mathematician. Our German friends—or at least, so we often thought—appeared to us to be a little too much exclusively interested in the “speculative” philosopher; at times they seemed to us to be judging simply as a great Professor a man whose avowed dearest interest was the purification and rekindling of the moral and religious life of mankind. In the dark post-war days there was an output of German work on Plato which seemed to indicate that the thinkers of the German nation were discovering

almost as a new truth that side of the great Greek poet-philosopher which had always appealed most strongly to ourselves. But it still remains true that each nation naturally tends to see in the Platonic writings just that side of them which is most congenial to its own native disposition and to neglect the rest. We need to have our one-sidednesses corrected by the judgement of a scholar who is acquainted with both the traditions and in a position to be impartial to both. This is just the part which Dr. Gauss is admirably adapted to fill. He is neither Briton nor German, but a Swiss; his studies at the University of Basle have naturally been directed in the first instance by German or German-trained scholars, but, as his work will show, he has a sound knowledge of the British Platonic tradition, and has been deeply influenced by it. It is a compliment to us that his work should be published in our language and in our country. And there is one important point which I think he appreciates more fully than most of the best of the German scholars seem to do, the close affinity, in spite of all inevitable differences, between Platonism and Christianity, which is proved by the fact that for so many centuries, from the second down to the thirteenth, it was the Platonic tradition, as partially transmitted

through Plotinus and Proclus, which provided the thinkers of the Christian Church with their intellectual background. If we are to understand Plato fully, we need to remember, as I think very excellent German scholars sometimes tend to forget, that Origen, the Cappadocian Fathers, Anselm, Bonaventura, with all the important modifications which the Scriptures have brought into their vision of God and the world, are still in the legitimate succession from Plato. I have myself been subjected to criticism on the charge of a tendency to make Plato "almost a Christian". If this be a fault it may be excused by the remembrance that an illustrious band of Christian writers, from Clement of Alexandria to Whichcote and John Smith, or even, I might say, to Westcott and Inge in our own lifetime, have been no less alive to the affinity of spirit. The able and vigorous writers of the Neo-Thomist revival have done splendid work in insisting on the intimate connection between a Christian theology and a metaphysic which is *solidaire* with that of the best Greek thought. But sooner or later they themselves, I believe, will discover that to get the best out of the Greek tradition one must not stop short with the "semi-naturalist" Aristotle, but go back to Aristotle's master. St. Bonaventura long ago wrote that

“to Aristotle was granted the spirit of knowledge, to Plato that of wisdom,” a saying which Dr. Gauss could adopt as heartily as I do myself. I trust that his study of the “wisdom” of Plato will find a cordial reception among us.

A. E. TAYLOR.

PREFACE

A BOOK on Plato hardly needs any apology or previous justification. "No philosophic writer of past ages", says Professor G. C. Field,¹ "has such permanent interest and value as Plato. We ought to read him primarily for the help that he can give to our own philosophical thinking. That is certainly what he himself would have wished." And Professor A. E. Taylor writes:² "To few men does the world owe a heavier debt than to Plato. He has taught us that philosophy, loving and single-minded devotion to truth, is the great gift of God to man and the rightful guide of man's life, and that the few to whom the intimate vision of truth has been granted are false to their calling unless they bear fruit in unwearied and humble service to their fellows. All worthy civilization is fed by those ideas, and whenever, after a time of confusion and forgetfulness, our Western world has recaptured the sense of noble living, it has sought them afresh in the Platonic writings."

If this is true, then it would appear that a

¹ *Plato and his Contemporaries*, p. 1.

² *Platonism and its Influence*, p. 3.

renewal of Platonic studies was once again greatly needed at the present time. For no one will deny that we are to-day going through a period of trouble and uncertainty. There are signs that would indicate that a chapter of our history has come to an end, and that we are embarking on an unknown future. It is, however, not so much the prospect of great changes affecting our institutions and our modes of life that constitute in my eyes the gravity of the situation; what is much more alarming, I believe, is the fact that there is in our generation a widespread hostility to thought and intelligence. Reason as such is spoken against. Not merely individual men, but, as it seems, whole nations are refusing to control their lives any longer according to rational standards, and proclaim that they will trust henceforth to instinct alone and emotion and to the "dynamic of events". But thus, it must be feared, they are opening again the door to all kinds of superstitions, and are removing the obstacles that stand in the way of what, should it actually come, would probably have to be described as a return of the Dark Ages. For, as Ennius knew long ago,

Pellitur e medio sapientia: vi geritur res.

It is against that intellectual defeatism, and as a plea for independent thinking under the

guidance of the sense of moral responsibility, that I have decided to write a series of "Studies on Plato and Platonism". It has long since become a settled belief of mine that it would be highly desirable for the welfare of our common inheritance if there were a few people who would voluntarily set themselves apart for the purpose of hard and fearless thinking and who would then also live according to their best insight, whatever might be the consequences. This counsel, I admit, sounds dangerous, if not revolutionary; but on a closer examination it will be found that it is not so. For if these thinkers keep faithful to their task, they are not allowed to question only those institutions and current opinions which they find without; they must inquire also into the validity of their own judgments which proceed from within; and thus they will be prevented from running into any rash or inconsiderate actions. What is to be expected as a result of their efforts is rather that they will move, so to speak, from the conventional beliefs and customs that lie on the surface towards those more central truths which make for firmness of conviction and stability in purpose. And than that I can scarcely see anything that is at present more urgently needed in our civilization, which, frittering away its energies on matters

of secondary importance, has become increasingly hollow in those places where it ought to have its centre of gravity.

From these remarks it will already have become apparent, to a certain degree, what these planned studies on Plato are likely to be. Their purport will be systematic rather than historical. They will not so much aim at giving an account of Plato's intellectual development, or at describing through what channels he acquired his convictions, as make an attempt to set forth those teachings of his that are, as it seems, of a permanent value, that have influenced all subsequent thought, and that, lastly, may help even us in our own philosophical efforts.

In more detail my design is the following. In a first study, in the essay which I here submit to the public, I shall try to describe what I believe to be the Platonic conception of philosophy. I have been brought to this decision by two reasons. The first is that, as a Platonist, I am convinced that in philosophy, as in any other discipline concerned with ultimate truth, it is impossible to get any understanding whatever, except by conforming to their moral standards; and so, consequently, it seemed to me desirable to expound first of all the conditions on which, and on which alone, as far as I can see, the philo-

sophical vision can be granted. And secondly, there are so many definitions of philosophy, and, what is worse, so many vague and hazy ideas about its aims and methods, that I do not know how a philosopher could reasonably hope to be listened to unless he explain at the beginning, in clear terms, what he himself takes philosophy to stand for.

But if a discussion on the meaning of philosophy may thus claim, for didactic reasons, the first place in this series of studies, it is undeniable that the main task of the philosopher is to give reasons for the convictions he holds regarding the great issues of human life. I shall therefore proceed, in a second study, to an examination of the *First Principles of Platonism*, that is, to an inquiry into Plato's doctrine of "Ideas", the "Good", "Matter", "Soul", and "Number". It will be seen that in the main I can adhere to his views. It is only in his ultimate religious pre-suppositions that they seem to me to be inadequate. There, as a Christian, I cannot agree with him. It is accordingly rather a Christian Platonism, or a kind of Johannine Christianity, than the historical teaching of Plato, that I shall advocate in these studies. This means, of course, a considerable deviation from Plato's philosophy as originally conceived. It does not imply, however,

as might be supposed, that through this Christian interpretation the free philosophical outlook that is so characteristic of Plato would necessarily be impaired. That this is not so, at least in my own case, will, I hope, be proved by the fact that with me, on the contrary, philosophical arguments weighed so heavily that eventually they forced upon me a change in my ecclesiastical allegiance.¹

In these first two studies, then, on *Plato's Conception of Philosophy*, and on the *First Principles of Platonism*, I intend to set forth in outline what I believe to be the right kind of philosophy, or the *philosophia perennis*, as it is sometimes called. After that I propose to go in for a more detailed examination of Plato's logic and ethics, and of his social philosophy; thus trying to find a way towards a coherent and reasonable view of things with which, I trust, it should be possible to face confidently and courageously the manifold difficulties of our present age.

It goes without saying that in an enterprise as vast as that I have become indebted to a great number of men, be it for instruction, friendly advice, or mere encouragement. Unfortunately, space forbids me to enumerate them all here.

¹ From Continental Protestantism to Anglicanism.

Yet I should feel wanting in the sense of gratitude, did I not single out the names of those at least to whom my indebtedness is greatest and, if I may say so, constant: I mean Dr. Inge, Dr. Clement C. J. Webb, and Professor A. E. Taylor. To them I owe probably more than I can express in words. In choosing them as my masters I could become a link in a living tradition; and I confess readily that it is owing to their influence that in the end I tried to publish the result of my investigations in English. Perhaps no less am I obliged to Professor P. Häberlin of Basle University. He was not only my principal teacher, when I was a student, and a friendly guide in the years of my mental fermentation; he has also given me ever since unmistakable tokens of his continued sympathy with my efforts. And last, but not least, I want to mention my friend, Mr. E. Eugster, inspector of forestry at Brig, who always stood faithfully at my side and often believed much better in my work than I did myself, and without whose moral support these studies would hardly ever have been taken in hand.

For this first study in particular, I am greatly indebted once more to Professor A. E. Taylor, who, in spite of his manifold duties and engagements, took upon himself to read it through in

typescript and to make a considerable number of suggestions from which I profited a good deal, and who in the end was kind enough too to introduce me to the English public. I am also greatly obliged to Mr. H. Colville-Stewart, who with never-failing courtesy assisted me in my struggle with the intricacies of English grammar and idiom. It is mainly due to him if, as I hope, this book eventually has become at least readable. I want to express my thanks to him further, as well as to my friend, Mr. R. G. Coulson, and to Mr. P. M. Moulding, for their generous offer to help me in reading the proofs.

As standard ~~text~~ of Plato's writings I have regarded throughout Burnet's edition in the *Bibliotheca Oxoniensis*. The English quotations from his dialogues have been taken from Jowett's translation. Acknowledgements are due to the Clarendon Press and to the Jowett trustees for their kind permission to make free use of that great work.

I should like to thank here also Messrs. Macmillan for friendly advice and for the great honour they have done me by accepting this essay for publication, and to Messrs. R. & R. Clark in Edinburgh for the great care which they have taken with the printing of it.

Finally, I have ventured to dedicate this little

book to Dr. C. C. J. Webb as a sign of gratitude, however inadequate, for his extraordinary kindness towards me from the first day we met, and for many encouragements given me in a perhaps not too pleasant period of my life.

H. G.

LONDON, *March* 1937

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Ars est enim philosophia vitae.
CICERO, *De Fin.* iii. 2. 4.

I

THE teacher of philosophy labours under a difficulty from which all other teachers seem to be happily free: he cannot tell what philosophy, generally speaking, means. There are, apparently, as many conceptions of philosophy as there are philosophers. To the ordinary man in the street this sounds astonishing; he can hardly understand how it is possible to devote a life's time and energy to a cause that is so vague and, as it were, in a state of such constant fluctuation, that even after many centuries of its history it has not yet become clear what it actually aims at. Nor is philosophy looked at with greater deference by the public at large. And no wonder: for how could that be expected to fetch a high price in the open market of life which is not able to recommend its usefulness in a more unambiguous and convincing manner?

On a closer examination, however, it appears

that this disadvantage of the philosopher is inherent in his task itself and not his own fault. For to him it is not given to begin his inquiries in a realm that has been, so to speak, carved out for him beforehand, as it is generally the case with the scientist or the historian; nor can he follow a method that has been tried and found efficient by his predecessors. On him is laid as an integral part of his study the burden of finding out first of all what he has to inquire into and by what method he has to proceed. And so he cannot step into a tradition and carry on the work where it has been left to him by a master or teacher; he has to begin it again, it would seem, quite anew.

This, no doubt, is a great handicap; to say the least, it involves a considerable waste of time; but the matter could hardly be otherwise. For suppose that a general definition of philosophy could be given that the philosophers had merely to accept and make their own, would this not from the very outset limit the range of their thoughts and fetter their minds in a way incompatible with the purpose they have in view?

But, if thus the first and perhaps the most difficult problem that the philosopher has to face is to discover what his own profession

means, how are we best to grapple with it? By an historical investigation, I would suggest. For by this method, although it may still appear to be beyond human power to find out what philosophy meant to all philosophers taken together, we may hope to discover at least what it was considered to be by each of its foremost representatives, and thus, by means of a comparison between the various conceptions offered to our choice, to become competent judges to decide to which in the end, if to any at all, we will give our approbation. I readily admit that this method will not lead us straight-way to our goal, but rather takes us a long way round, and apparently without purpose; but on second thoughts, I trust, it will nevertheless be accepted with a good grace as being the only safe path out of our difficulty; and I am confident that even its many detours will not any longer be condemned as useless or remembered as unnecessarily burdensome. For in both cases, be it that we, feeling strong enough, venture to decide on our own account what philosophy henceforth shall stand for in our opinion, or be it that we, more modestly, want to try to find a master whom we may trust and accept as our teacher and our guide in life, we must make sure that we know all possible issues and that none

has been overlooked. We are not allowed to leave, to speak metaphorically, a corner of the field unexplored or a fortress in our back unassailed, lest we might be compelled later on, when we have progressed already considerably far, to own (if we then are still sincere enough) that we have deceived ourselves in a point of fundamental importance, and that the best thing to do in the present circumstances would be to give up our position and to retreat until we have reached again a safe line.

If, therefore, I have ventured to write and to submit to the reader a study on "Plato's Conception of Philosophy", two things, I would ask, should be noticed. The first is that I regard myself as belonging to those who prefer attaching themselves to a school of thought to speaking, as it were, in their own name. That choice may proceed from my natural inclinations; it may however also be prompted by the conviction that in philosophy there is no other road to achievement than a protracted discipleship. And secondly, it will be evident from what has been said that I did not pick up my subject merely at random, but rather arrived at it gradually and as the result of a long and careful selection. This must not imply, of course, that I did not feel attracted

towards Plato since the time when I began my philosophical studies; it only means that I should not have allowed myself to be styled a Platonist before I had become capable of giving account why I did not wish to be regarded as a member of any other philosophical tradition.

From these few remarks it will have become equally clear why I do not wish in this essay merely to give a description of Plato's philosophical attitude, leaving aside what other philosophers have to say in favour of theirs, but rather want to confront it with as many other points of view as possible. For whereas that former procedure could base its pleading only on the internal evidence of Plato's own cause, the adopted one has the advantage that it can corroborate its arguments also by external witnesses, namely by pointing to the objections to which those other conceptions seem to be exposed.

My first task, accordingly, is to give a survey of the principal doctrines concerning the essence and meaning of philosophy that have been put forward in the past. For this purpose, I think, we should turn for help to the historians, and among them I would propose to select as our guide the late Professor Windelband. He was not only a great authority in the history of

philosophy, but at the same time a systematic philosopher of no little reputation; and so he is qualified, it seems to me, as few others would be, to give us advice in our present endeavour. It happens, moreover, that he opens his celebrated *History of Philosophy*¹ with a chapter devoted entirely to a discussion of the "name and conception of philosophy" in which no less regard is paid to the historical background of the several theories under examination than to their systematical significance, that is, with precisely what we want at the present.

Windelband there enumerates four different types of philosophy, and maintains that each of those types mainly flourished in a special period in the history of thought, to the general outlook of which it has given its corresponding intellectual expression.

In the first period, which ranges roughly from Thales to Aristotle, philosophy, in the opinion of that great scholar, "acquired the fixed significance according to which it denotes exactly the same as the German word 'Wissenschaft'. According to this meaning philosophy in general is the methodical work of thought, through which we are to know that which 'is';

¹ Translated by James H. Tufts, and published by Macmillan in 1893.

individual 'philosophies' are the particular sciences in which individual realms of the existent are to be investigated and known."¹ In other words, to know the essence of reality, at least in its general features, may be said to be the aim of this kind of philosophy. To us it is perhaps best known under the name of "natural philosophy". It is a branch of philosophy that, as we know, has still its many votaries to-day, though I do not think that it could be said to be its most prominent representative at the present. Windelband himself, to be sure, would not approve of its being so, because it seems to him to be out of date now; yet it is noteworthy that he admits that a strong revival of this conception of philosophy took place after the "Renaissance", when, in addition to the characteristics already mentioned, it got the further distinction of being a "world-wisdom", as opposed to Church dogma from which it gradually and painfully had emancipated itself.

The second type he distinguishes is that represented by the post-Aristotelian philosophers, *i.e.* by the schools of the Stoics, the Epicureans, and the Sceptics, to which may be added also that of the numerous Eclectics

¹ *Op. cit.* p. 1 sq.

and Syncretists of the Hellenistic age. In this period philosophy "received the practical meaning of an art of life, based upon scientific principles".¹ Mere intellectual curiosity is disparaged by the fashionable thinkers of this time; what they want philosophy to provide is practical advice for a life that is meant to be at once both virtuous and happy.

Thirdly, there intervened a time, Windelband says, when "during the unbroken dominance of Church doctrine there remained for philosophy, for the most part, only the position of a handmaid to ground, develop, and defend dogma scientifically".² This period, as might be gathered even from these few words alone, seemed to him the least satisfactory one; and consequently he treats it in his later and historical chapters in a rather perfunctory manner. Personally I am afraid that this lack of understanding of, and sympathy with, thinkers like St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas is the one serious drawback in an otherwise great book.

Fourthly and lastly, when after all these vicissitudes of fortune its confidence in itself became shaken, philosophy was reduced, Windelband contends, by Kant to the "critical

¹ *History of Philosophy* p. 2.

² *Ib.* p. 3.

consideration of Reason itself",¹ or to a critical inquiry by our intelligence into its own credentials with a view to ascertaining the validity or the range of application of its various pronouncements, be it in its own proper domain, systematic philosophy, or in the larger field of the sciences. Philosophy, as conceived in this way, would have nothing to do immediately with reality itself, whose study is left to the manifold branches of empirical research, and to those alone; it would deal exclusively with the judgements that our understanding passes on things real, investigating their logical foundations and trying to vindicate their truth or expose their falsehood. It is this definition of philosophy that Windelband adopts for himself; although, far from having gained "universal acceptance", it is regarded by him as the "apparently final" one.

I think it will be easily conceded that this classification of different conceptions of philosophy covers a wide ground, and that it would not be unreasonable to assume that it includes all the more important interpretations that have been given to philosophy in the past, minor varieties being reducible to one or a combination of several of those four heads.

¹ *Ib.* p. 4.

And if so, then our next step will be to examine whether Platonism, or, incidentally, that which I believe to be the right kind of philosophy, can be explained by any of these four definitions, or whether we have to go beyond them all, acknowledging that Platonism, like the angels in Thomistic philosophy, is a species of its own. I shall begin my inquiry with an examination of the question whether Platonism, rightly understood, may be conceived as an instance of the type commonly called "natural philosophy".

In order to avoid disappointment, let me submit at the very beginning of our discussion that the answer to this question can hardly be expected to be in the affirmative. Even a superficial acquaintance with his works must convince us that Plato cannot well be regarded as a "natural philosopher" in the same sense as, for instance, Aristotle or the Ionians. He neither gave himself to a study of nature as if it was an end in itself, nor did he devote any of his dialogues to natural philosophy, except perhaps the *Timaeus* at a very late date. But even regarding that work, we may doubt whether Plato was interested in the matter expounded in it from the point of view of a mere

scientist. It may reasonably be asked whether it would not be much nearer the truth to interpret that dialogue as an attempt of Plato's to draw such a picture of the world and of man as is compatible with, and demanded by, his moral convictions, as laid down antecedently in the *Philebus*. If so, *Timaeus* would then indeed still testify to the fact that Plato was keenly interested in natural phenomena, but it could not be said to represent natural philosophy proper, because the investigation of nature that we find in it would not appear to have been carried out for its own sake. The dialogue would occupy rather a similar place in Plato's philosophy to that of the *Critique of Judgement* in Kant's. This, at least, is the opinion of Proclus, when he affirms that there is in *Timaeus* just as much "theology" as "physiology";¹ and his interpretation of Plato is never to be despised offhand.

But Plato not only abstained from the speculations of natural philosophy; we know, moreover, that he did not esteem very highly those who indulged in them. In the *Lysis*² he quotes on a certain occasion from the natural

¹ In *Tim.* i. p. 8, 3 sqq. (Diehl): μέγνυσι δὲ τῷ ἀποφαντικῷ τὸ ἀποδεικτικόν, καὶ τὰ φυσικὰ οὐ φυσικῶς μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ θεολογικῶς νοεῖν ἡμᾶς παρασκευάζει

² 214 B.

philosophers as from those who "lecture and write about Nature and the Whole", where, no doubt, it is his intention to convey to the reader that such an attempt must be looked at with suspicion, as aiming at something that is clearly beyond the range of human understanding; and this impression is confirmed when we learn from Cicero that the natural philosophers were nowhere more scoffed at than in the "Academy".¹

It seems that Plato inherited this critical attitude towards natural philosophy from Socrates. And in Socrates it was probably the result of personal experiences of his own. That is at least what is suggested to us by the *Phaedo*. For if the autobiographical part of that dialogue is historically true—and I do not see any reason why it should not be taken for such—, then we must conclude that Socrates, in an earlier period of his life, spent a great deal of his time in asking physical, physiological, and cosmological questions, and that he only in riper years, presumably not in the last instance under the influence of the Peloponnesian War and its consequences, turned to the moral inquiries and to the cross-examination of his fellow-citizens for which he became so famous afterwards.

¹ *Ac. pr.* ii. 17. 55: qui maxime in Academia inridentur.

"When I was young", Plato makes him say,¹ "I had a prodigious desire to know that department of philosophy which is called the investigation of nature; to know the causes of things, and why a thing is and is created or destroyed appeared to me to be a lofty profession." With this would agree, also, at least as far as the central idea is concerned, the picture of Socrates as drawn by Aristophanes in his *Clouds*, where he is represented as the leader of a learned society of men deeply engaged in all sorts of subtle and ridiculous questions about nature and natural events. But that Socrates was ever a natural philosopher by conviction, seems to me, in spite of all that, hardly credible. The fact rather was that, although attracted by them, he never placed much confidence in studies of that kind. Xenophon, at any rate, tells us explicitly that he often wondered why the people who pursued them could not realize that they are too high for men.² And, what is perhaps still more illuminating, he never, as we know, could prevail upon himself to put down the results of his physical and physiological research work in a written document. It looks therefore as if investigations of natural phen-

¹ *Phaedo* 96 A.

² *Mem.* i. 1. 13: 'Εθαύμαζε δ' εἰ μὴ φανερόν αὐτοῖς ἔστιν, ὅτι ταῦτα οὐ δυνατόν ἔστιν ἀνθρώποις εὐρεῖν.

omena became increasingly unimportant to him as he advanced in years. They did not help him in his effort to find a firm moral conviction with which he could hope to face life, and so in the end, apparently, he abandoned them altogether. "Not that I mean to speak disparagingly of any one who is a student of natural philosophy," he says¹ . . . "but the simple truth is, O Athenians, that I have nothing to do with physical speculations." . . . "The men who dwell in the city are my teachers and not the trees or the country."²

Turning to Plato, what strikes us in his controversy with the natural philosophers is, among other things, that he so often complains of the darkness of their speech with which they seem to screen their oracular pronouncements, and of the stubbornness with which they cling to their own particular opinions. "Whether any of them spoke the truth in all this", he writes,³ "is hard to determine. . . . Yet one thing may be said of them without offence."—"What thing?"—"That they went on their several ways disdaining to notice people like ourselves; they did not care whether they took us with them, or left us behind them." . . . "They may be unassailable."⁴ . . . "They grow up at their own

¹ *Apol.* 19 C.² *Phaedr.* 230 D.³ *Sophist* 243 A.⁴ *Theaet.* 179 C.

sweet will and get their inspiration anywhere, each of them saying of his neighbour that he knows nothing.”¹

Of course, such discriminations as these would be *ad hominem* only; they could not carry much weight, if they were not accompanied by more substantial arguments. At their best they could be regarded as a little skirmish before the real battle. I will therefore proceed at once to an examination of the graver objections that Plato has raised in his dialogues against the aims and claims of natural philosophy.

Now the first of these more “substantial” arguments against natural philosophy, I would say, is one that deals with the notion of substance itself. It is to the effect that neither the theory of those who maintain that there is in nature ultimately one substance only, nor that of those who assume that there are several substances equally primordial and irreducible into one another, is tenable when brought into the light of clear thinking. This he shows in the following way. Supposing, first, that there are several ultimate realities. “Come, we will say,” he writes,² “ye, who affirm that hot and cold or

¹ *Ib.* 180 B. The Greek is: οὐδὲ γίγνεται τῶν τοιούτων ἕτερος ἑτέρου μαθητῆς, ἀλλ’ αὐτόματοι ἀναφύονται ὁπόθεν ἂν τύχῃ ἕκαστος αὐτῶν ἐνθουσιάζας, καὶ τὸν ἕτερον ὃ ἕτερος οὐδὲν ἡγείται εἰδέναι.

² *Sophist* 243 D, E.

any other two principles are the universe, what is this term which you apply to both of them, and what do you mean when you say that both and each of them 'are'? How are we to understand the word 'are'? Upon your view, are we to suppose that there is a third principle over and above the other two—three in all and not two? For clearly you cannot say that one of the two principles is being, and yet attribute being equally to both of them; for, if you did, whichever of the two is identified with being, will comprehend the other; and so they will be one and not two."

Such is Plato's cause against the pluralists. His plea against the monists proceeds on much the same lines. "What about the assertors of the oneness of the all," he asks,¹ "must we not endeavour to ascertain from them what they mean by 'being'?"—"By all means."—"Then let them answer this question: One, you say, alone is?"—"Yes, will they reply."—"And there is something which you call being?"—"Yes."—"And is being the same as One, and do you apply two names to the same thing? What will be their answer, Stranger?"—"It is clear, Theaetetus, that he who asserts the unity of being will find a difficulty in answering this

¹ *Sophist* 244 B, C.

or any other question.”—“Why so?”—“To admit of two names, and to affirm that there is nothing but unity, is surely ridiculous.”

I have nothing to say about these reasonings by way of comment except that they seem to me perfectly valid. Indeed, I do not perceive how anything could be added to or taken away from them to make them more conclusive. The problem stands to-day, as far as I can see, exactly where it stood in Plato's time; it has been solved as little by the monists or pluralists of our own days as by those in the fifth and fourth centuries before our Christian era.

To the average modern reader, however, it may be that these arguments do not appear to be equally evident. As a matter of fact, I should not even be surprised to hear that they strike him as artificial, if not to say sophisticated. And yet, should this prove to be the case, it would result, I am afraid, from nothing else than the fact that in the last centuries our philosophical thinking has been to a great extent under the influence of the so-called exact sciences, physics and specially mechanics. For, as is well known, these sciences as a rule take reality, regarded in itself, for granted; they assume tacitly that it is given to us somehow, and that we are in ignorance only

about its details. Add to this that, on the other hand, they are prone to regard the concepts by which we try to describe things as merely the products of our mental activity and, therefore, so to speak, as labels that can be attached to and taken off them by us at will, and it will be easily understood why there appears no flaw from their point of view in giving two names to one and the same thing. But, on a closer scrutiny, it must be manifest that, however familiar the modern mind may have become with this mental attitude, the doctrine underlying it cannot well be defended. And this for two reasons. First, because it must not be presumed that what is right in some special branches of science must be valid in philosophy also; for whereas the former deal with particular facts, the latter is concerned with first principles. In our present case this means that while in the experimental sciences we are allowed to take reality for granted, because reality as conceived by them is always a reality more or less circumscribed by the results of former investigations, there arises in philosophy the serious question whether there would be left for us any substance or reality whatever when stripped of all its qualities at once. In the practical work of scientific research, to be sure, such a process of

abstraction can never be carried out to its end; we always leave out only some particular features or qualities while retaining others; but in philosophical reasoning nothing hinders us from trying to find out, at least in imagination, what would be the result, if we were able to perform in an instant what we in fact can do only in part and in the succession of time. And the result, I believe, would be this: although I could not persuade myself that there would remain nothing of reality, if I were to detach from it all the qualities by which I can picture it or think about it in my mind (since this doctrine would involve that reality as such is the product of my intelligence or imagination), I should nevertheless have to own that reality would become utterly meaningless for me, because, not being able to grasp it in any conceivable way, I could not get any representation of it in my imagination, nor make it in any manner an object of my thought. In other words, it would practically turn out to be for me as good as non-existent, though I should not believe that it would actually cease to exist. —This was the first reason. The second is to the effect that, if we imagine that reality is given somehow to us independently of our thinking and that, on the other hand, all the notions by

which we describe that reality are only the creation of our minds, then there would be left no justification for our assumption that those notions can in fact describe actual features of the real. The two realms, reality and our thoughts, would fall entirely apart, and, if they should meet none the less, their contact with each other would be a mere coincidence and could not be conceived of as other than purely casual. But on such a hypothesis no account could be given of how human knowledge, even as a solely experimental investigation of reality, is possible, since there could be found no bond between it and our thoughts, and therefore no rules either by which we might conduct and control our inquiries.

With this, I think, we may leave the problem of "substance" and go on to a brief analysis of the concept of "causation". Here we are presented once more with the same spectacle as before: we see the natural philosophers use that notion like that of "being" as if its meaning were quite plain to them, whereas in fact it involves some of the most intricate puzzles within the whole range of philosophy. Even Socrates admits having been deluded for a time on this point, and it seems that he

was cured of his error only through his ardent and earnest desire to see things as they are whatever the consequences. "I was fascinated", he tells us,¹ "by them (*sc.* those inquiries into the causes of things) to such a degree that my eyes grew blind to things which I had seemed to myself, and also to others, to know quite well; I forgot what I had before thought self-evident truths; *e.g.* such a fact as that the growth of man is the result of eating and drinking; for when by the digestion of food flesh is added to flesh and bone to bone, and whenever there is an aggregation of congenial elements, the lesser bulk becomes larger and the small man great. . . . Well; but let me tell you something more. There was a time when I thought that I understood the meaning of greater and less pretty well; and when I saw a great man standing by a little one, I fancied that the one was taller than the other by a head; or one horse would appear to be greater than another horse: and still more clearly did I seem to perceive that ten is two more than eight, and that two cubits are more than one, because two is the double of one."—"And what is now your notion of such matters?"—"I should be far enough from imagining that I knew the cause of any of

¹ *Phaedo* 96 C-97 B.

them, by heaven I should; for I cannot satisfy myself that, when one is added to one, the one to which the addition is made becomes two, or that the two units added together make two by reason of the addition. I cannot understand how, when separated from the other, each of them was one and not two, and now, when they are brought together, the mere juxtaposition or meeting of them should be the cause of their becoming two: neither can I understand how the division of one is the way to make two; for then a different cause would produce the same effect,—as in the former instance the addition and juxtaposition of one to one was the cause of two, in this the separation and subtraction of one from the other would be the cause. Nor am I any longer satisfied that I understand the reason why one or anything else is either generated or destroyed or is at all . . .”

I have always admired this passage for its power to awake us out of our “dogmatic slumber”, and for its ability to stir up in us that sense of wonder which, according to Plato¹ and Aristotle,² is the beginning of philosophy. It shows us, moreover, I believe, what are the consequences if we allow the rays of clear thinking to penetrate the hazy atmosphere that

¹ *Theaet.* 155 D.

² *Met.* i. 2; 982 b, 12 sq.

as a rule surrounds the notions which we employ in practical daily life. Or, is it not astonishing to notice how utterly incapable we are of giving a satisfactory logical account of cause and effect, although the whole fabric of our lives seems to be reared on this foundation, since without causation there could not be either means and ends, that is, those terms without which no purposive action is imaginable?

And yet, in spite of all this ignorance about causation,—an ignorance that in the eyes of Socrates, let me repeat, is mainly due to our inability to explain, first, whence it comes that there can emerge from two conditions, namely from an agent and from a thing acted upon, a third and single event, or that which we call the result in an occurrence; and again, secondly, upon what reason we are entitled to explain an apparently continuous natural process by splitting it up, as it were, into two component parts, namely a first part played by an active force and a second part played by a passive material on which the active force is exercising its influence—, concerning one point he was absolutely firm. Whatever may be our doubts about causality, this much is for him unquestionably certain, that, if we want to understand the real meaning of cause and effect, *i.e.*

the *propter hoc* or inner connection of things of which we see only the *post hoc* or temporal succession, we must find a reason for this inner connection; and that this reason can never be found in a merely physical or natural agency, but must always be sought for in a mind or in an intelligence that acts with a view to what is best and with the help of physical laws connects things as means to an end. It is the failure to grasp this obvious truth, he contends, that has spoilt the philosophy of Anaxagoras. "I might compare him", he says,¹ "to a person who began by maintaining generally that mind is the cause of the actions of Socrates, but who, when he endeavoured to explain the causes of my several actions in detail, went on to show that I sit here because my body is made up of bones and muscles; and the bones, as he would say, are hard and have joints which divide them, and the muscles are elastic, and they cover the bones, which have also a covering or environment of flesh and skin which contains them; and as the bones are lifted at their joints by the contraction or relaxation of the muscles, I am able to bend my limbs, and that is why I am sitting here in a curbed posture—that is what he would say; and he would have a similar

¹ *Phaedo* 98 C-99 A.

explanation of my talking to you, which he would attribute to sound, and air, and hearing, and he would assign ten thousand other causes of the same sort, forgetting to mention the true cause, which is, that the Athenians have thought fit to condemn me, and accordingly I have thought it better and more right to remain here and undergo my sentence; for I am inclined to think that these muscles and bones of mine would have gone off long ago to Megara or Boeotia—by the dog they would, if they had been moved only by their own idea of what was best, and if I had not chosen the better and nobler part, instead of playing truant and running away, of enduring any punishment which the state inflicts.”

In short, the charge that Socrates brings against the natural philosophers, and specially against Anaxagoras in view of this account of his of nature, is that they cannot distinguish between the *causa efficiens* and the *conditio sine qua non*. “There is”, he tells us,¹ “a strange confusion of cause and condition in all this. It may be said, indeed, that without bones and muscles and the other parts of the body, I cannot execute my purposes. But to say that I do as I do because of them, and that this is the way in which mind

¹ *Ib.* 99 A, B.

acts, and not from the choice of the best, is a very careless and idle mode of speaking."

This distinction between cause and condition must have been regarded by Plato as being of the greatest importance, for he comes back to it in the *Timaeus*, in the dialogue in which he attempts to give us a statement of his religious beliefs about God and creation. All the material agencies, we read there,¹ "are to be reckoned among the second and co-operative causes which God, carrying into execution the idea of the best as far as possible, uses as his ministers. They are thought by most men not to be the second, but the prime causes of all things, because they freeze and heat, and contract and dilate, and the like. But they are not so, for they are incapable of reason and intellect." They are, as another passage runs,² "the elements, thus of necessity then subsisting, which the creator of the fairest and best of created things associated with himself, when he made the self-sufficing and most perfect God,³ using the necessary causes as his ministers

¹ 46 C, D.

² 68 E.

³ *Sc.* our world; for in Plato's view this world was a perfect and self-contained system of changing finite creatures without beginning and end in time; and its creation means for him only that it could not have been given its existence by itself, but depends for that on a higher and more exalted source. Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *S.c.G.* ii. 18: "Non est enim creatio mutatio, sed ipsa dependentia esse creati ad principium a quo instituitur

in the accomplishment of his work, but himself contriving the good in all his creations." And Plato concludes:¹ "Wherefore we may distinguish two sorts of causes, the one divine and the other necessary, and may seek for the divine in all things, as far as our nature admits, with a view to the blessed life; but the necessary kind only for the sake of the divine, considering that without them and when isolated from them, these higher things for which we look cannot be apprehended or received or in any way shared by us".

It would be highly interesting to discuss at some greater length the theological and metaphysical implications of this doctrine of the "two causes", and to show how it was transmitted from Plato through the Neo-Platonists² as a middle link to the Schoolmen, until it found its probably finest expression in St. Thomas Aquinas, who says that this delegation of power to the creatures

. . . Dicitur tamen creatio esse mutatio quaedam, secundum modum intellegendi tantum, in quantum scilicet intellectus noster accipit unam et eandem rem ut non existentem prius et postea existentem".

¹ *Tim.* 68 E-69 A.

² See Proclus, *Elem. Theol.* Prop. 79: Πᾶν τὸ γινόμενον ἐκ τῆς διττῆς γίνεται δυνάμεως; and *In Tim.* i. 2, 29 sqq. (Diehl): Μόνος δὲ ὁ Πλάτων τοῖς Πυθαγορείοις ἐπομένως παραδίδωσι μὲν καὶ τὰ συναίτια τῶν φυσικῶν πραγμάτων. Unfortunately he does not tell us who these Pythagoreans were. Perhaps he did not know himself. For the term 'συναίτια' cf. Politicus, 281 D sq.

so that they can act as secondary causes "must not be attributed to any deficiency in God's excellence, but rather to His immense goodness for which He wished to bestow His similitude on the created things not only in so far as they exist, but also in that they may become the causes of other things".¹ But such a study would clearly be beyond the scope of this essay. Suffice it to remark that this doctrine is bound to separate Platonism wholly from such a "natural philosophy", or those metaphysical systems that would attempt to explain the universe by visible causes alone. Plutarch, who in several ways, though certainly not in all, kept most faithfully of all of Plato's followers to the genuine tradition of the school, and who, assisted by his broad common sense, could make occasional astonishingly shrewd observations, comments on it thus: "The very ancient theologians and poets", he says,² "fixed their eyes ex-

¹ *S.c.G.* iii. 70: "Non enim hoc est ex insufficientia divinae virtutis, sed ex immensitate bonitatis ipsius, per quam suam similitudinem rebus communicare voluit, non solum quantum ad hoc quod essent, sed etiam quantum ad hoc quod aliorum causae essent".

² *De Def. Orac.* 48: Καθόλου γάρ, ὥς φημι, δύο πάσης γενέσεως αἰτίας ἐχούσης, οἱ μὲν σφόδρα παλαιοὶ θεολόγοι καὶ ποιηταὶ τῇ κρείττονι μόνῃ τὸν νοῦν προσέχειν εἶλοντο, τοῦτο δὲ τὸ κοινὸν ἐπιφθεγγόμενοι πᾶσι πράγμασι·

Ζεὺς ἀρχή, Ζεὺς μέσσα, Διὸς δ' ἐκ πάντα πέλονται·

clusively on the higher of these two causes, when they on all occasions repeated the well-known words that 'Jove is the beginning, the middle, and the source of all'; as to the necessary or natural causes, they did not yet concern themselves with them. The so-called natural philosophers who came after them, on the contrary, lost sight of that admirable and divine principle and tried to explain the universe by referring it back to matter and the various dispositions of matter, that is, to the motions, mutations, and mixtures of its parts. And so", he concludes, "the account of both is defective." In Plutarch's opinion, therefore, it would seem that Platonism was a kind of correct *via media* between two extreme and erroneous positions. And this view, I think, is true. For I cannot but imagine that Plato, had he lived up to our own time, would have taken strong exceptions both to medieval theology, which vindicated to itself the right of deciding physical questions by submitting them to the alleged light of revelation; and to the general trend of modern thought, which makes more

ταῖς δ' ἀναγκαίαις καὶ φυσικαῖς οὐκ ἔτι προσήεσαν αἰτίαις. οἱ δὲ νεώτεροι τούτων καὶ φυσικοὶ προσαγορευόμενοι τοῦναντίον ἐκείνοις τῆς καλῆς καὶ θείας ἀποπλανηθέντες ἀρχῆς, ἐν σώμασι καὶ πάθεσι σωμάτων, πληγαῖς τε καὶ μεταβολαῖς καὶ κράσεσι τιθέντες τὸ σύμπαν, ὅθεν ἀμφοτέροις ὁ λόγος ἐνδεὴς τοῦ προσήκοντός ἐστιν.

and more towards a merely secular conception of things; and likewise as he would on the one hand have condemned, no doubt, as based on a most pernicious superstition the medieval habit of burning heretics for no other reason than that they had reached some new conclusions as to the nature of our physical surroundings, so he would again, I am convinced, have concurred on the other hand with Pope who, in view of the increasing ascendancy during the last centuries of the natural sciences over religious thought, complained in *The Dunciad* that

Philosophy that leaned on Heaven before
Shrinks to its second cause and is no more.

And thus, I think, we have arrived in our discussion at a stage where we can better appreciate the reasons of Plato's deep-rooted aversion from the natural philosophers. They seemed to him to be a sort of day-dreamers, their theories being no more than as it were an offspring of a muddled imagination and of such a nature that they could not, strictly speaking, be either proven or refuted, or even, as we have seen already, properly understood when brought into the broad daylight of clear thought. They were in his eyes, moreover, incurable dogmatists, sticking obstinately to their fancies and making

all reasonable discourse with them impossible. Those among my readers who are well acquainted with the dialogues will remember that Plato repeatedly contrasts the Eleatic gentleness with the wilful and arbitrary behaviour of the Heracliteans. But what weighed most with him in his verdict on the natural philosophers was undoubtedly the consideration that they, when they endeavoured to explain the world by a merely visible cause, were forced to exclude from their mental horizon all the higher invisible agencies, and to become blind to the fact that for us men, in the end, *omnia abeunt in mysterium*.

It might appear, therefore, that in this way our inquiry into the question whether Platonism can be taken for a species of natural philosophy had now come to an end, and that the matter might be regarded as finally disposed of. And yet, I submit, this would be a very hasty conclusion. For all the arguments proffered so far were apparently directed only against certain procedures and personal weaknesses of those natural philosophers who lived in Plato's lifetime or shortly before; none has been mentioned yet that must be thought of as invalidating natural philosophy itself. And as long as no objection of

that kind has been brought forward, it is still permissible to assume that Platonism is a species of natural philosophy, only differing to a large extent from all those embodiments of it that Plato found to be prevailing in his age.

I have therefore to go on and set forth those arguments of Plato's that speak against natural philosophy as such. They are, if I am not mistaken, of a threefold character. It was mentioned not long ago that natural philosophy, in explaining everything by physical causes, is bound to overlook the higher and spiritual forces that are operating in the world. And this failure to grasp the invisible above the visible makes itself felt, as we shall see presently, mainly in three ways: in the disparagement of "soul" or personality, to which it inevitably must lead; in the inability to account for the indisputable fact of moral obligation; and in the destroying of the feeling of awe, and, consequently, in the weakening of the spirit of worship and adoration in religion. Let me say a few words on each of these three topics.

Plato is deeply convinced, as we have seen, that the physical causes are only secondary or auxiliary agencies and that no real action originates from them, since actions presuppose a purpose, and therefore will and intelligence of

which both the physical bodies are in want. With him, accordingly, it is an axiomatic fact that the physical agents can receive their power to act only from outside, and at their best impart that power to other physical agents after it has been thus received. From where it follows further that all their several "virtues" are, so to speak, borrowed from elsewhere, and not intrinsic or inherent in them. The world of bodies, in other words, forms a chain of agents that is without beginning or end in time, but that has no life in it of its own making. Consequently, if there is action and movement at all, a higher form of activity than that found in the physical agents must be acknowledged to exist, that is, an agency that does not get its movement from without, but is capable of moving itself, which in Plato's terminology is called a "soul". That namely is, I take it, the gist of the famous "proof" for the immortality of the soul as set forth in the *Phaedrus*.¹ And in the *Laws* the same argument is reproduced. "I mean this", he writes there,² "when one thing changes another,

¹ 245 D. Plotinus renders the argument as follows (*Enn.* iv. 7, 9): οὐ γὰρ δὴ πάντα ἐπακτῶ ζωῇ χρήται· ἢ εἰς ἄπειρον εἰσιν· ἀλλὰ δεῖ τινα φύσιν πρῶτως ζῶσαν εἶναι, ἣν ἀνώλεθρον καὶ ἀθάνατον εἶναι δεῖ ἐξ ἀνάγκης, ἅτε ἀρχὴν ζωῆς καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις οὖσαν.

² 894 E-895 A.

and that another, of such will there be any primary changing element? How can a thing which is moved by another ever be the beginning of change? Impossible. But when the self-moved changes other, and that again other, and thus thousands upon ten thousands of bodies are set in motion, must not the beginning of all this motion be the change of the self-moving principle?"

In this argument, it seems to me, Plato criticizes the natural philosophers (and this time also natural philosophy as such, because without these presuppositions it would not be imaginable) for again no less than three reasons. First, he urges, in their attempt to explain the universe, they stop suddenly short somewhere in the middle of that unending chain of secondary causes and effects, and, in doing so, declare, without giving any convincing reason, that they have discovered the ultimate material principle of which all things are made; whereas in fact they have only reached a limit beyond which their power of observation cannot extend itself at the present moment. At the same time they do not recognize that, for a full understanding of the world in which we live, we cannot rely exclusively on the results that are the product of the reasonings and observations of our intellectual faculties, but have to accept as well the

testimony of those other witnesses that we find in ourselves, such as our moral, artistic, or religious consciousness. And, finally, out of these two errors springs their third and greatest fault, the mistaken idea that we can explain the higher principle by the lower, as if, to use an expression of Dr. Inge's,¹ we were to know things by their "roots", and not by their "fruits".

It is a well-known fact that this attempt to explain the higher by the lower was considered by all Platonists to be an especially great flaw, which for that reason they never got tired of castigating. That it is wrong, intellectually speaking, seemed to them evident from the consideration that to explain any effect whatever, we have always to assign a cause that contains at least as much power and value as that effect, if not more.² For suppose this was not so, then, they urge, we should not point to the real cause at all, but should rather call attention merely to the outward occasion or opportunity in which the effect we want to explain was brought about . . . by another

¹ *Outspoken Essays*, ii. p. 9 and elsewhere.

² So Proclus in his *Elem. Theol.* Prop. 7: "Πάν τὸ παρακτικὸν ἄλλου κρείττον ἐστὶ τῆς τοῦ παραγομένου φύσεως." It is noteworthy that in his "Third Meditation" Descartes has taken over this axiom as self-evident and as a help for proving the existence of God.

agency. To explain by way of an example, could we ever honestly accept as a valid argument the assertion that thought is created, when by what we call the law of association one idea calls forth another idea? Or is it not plain that the association of ideas is only a way by which thought proceeds, *i.e.* one of its means and conditions, but nevermore the cause by which thought qua thought is produced?

But it is not so much this logical mistake which they believed they could perceive in it that caused the Platonists to take up arms against the method of explaining the higher principle by the lower, as the undesirable consequences which they thought it would have for our practical lives. And, indeed, their fears in that respect are not wholly unjustified. For, if this method was actually successful, then it would in the end reduce all things to the push and pull of mechanical agents, or at least of such causes as are conceived of in close analogy to those mechanically working bodies, and thus it would overpower our "souls" and personalities, together with all the values that make up our spiritual existence. The realm of the spirit, to speak metaphorically, would be at most a sort of hazy vapour hovering unsteadily above the solid structure of massive corporeal reality.

Or again, to use another picture, our souls, as Plotinus thought, would be degraded to the meanest station among created things, being placed far below the material bodies from which they are said to derive their energy and power; for they would, in his words, "in thus striving after them, acknowledge to be inferior to them," forgetting more and more their divine origin and likeness.¹ No wonder, therefore, that Plato upbraids the natural philosophers for being men who "affirm that which is the first cause of the generation and destruction of all things, not to be first, but last, and that which is last to be first" and so turn, as it were, the world upside-down.² Finally, if we remember that, as was intimated, this fault of theirs does not affect only men's thinking faculties, but has simultaneously its repercussions also on their moral actions, then, I

¹ See *Enn.* v. 1. 1, especially the following sentence: ἅμα γὰρ διώκεται ἄλλο καὶ θαυμάζεται καὶ τὸ θαυμάζον καὶ διώκον ὁμολογεῖ χεῖρον εἶναι· χεῖρον δὲ αὐτό τι θέμενον γιγνομένων καὶ ἀπολλυμένων ἀτιμωτάτον τε καὶ θνητότατον πάντων ὧν τιμῇ ὑπολαμβάνον οὔτε θεοῦ φύσιν οὔτε δύναμιν ἂν ποτε ἐν θυμῷ βάλοιτο.

² *Laws* 891 E: ὁ πρῶτον γενέσεως καὶ φθορᾶς αἴτιον ἀπάντων, τοῦτο οὐ πρῶτον ἀλλὰ ὕστερον ἀπεφάνησαν εἶναι . . . ὁ δὲ ὕστερον, πρότερον. This, by the way, is, as far as I know, the first passage in which this technical term has been used for what we in English commonly call putting the cart before the horse.

think, we shall have no more difficulties in understanding why Plato felt so hostile to the aspirations of natural philosophy.

This hostility, however, will become still more intelligible when we proceed to our second point, to the alleged inability of natural philosophy to do justice to our moral consciousness. Here the grievance of Plato is the following. If the world, he calculates, could actually be explained by natural factors, and by them alone, then the claim of morality to possessing, so to speak, in the notion of obligation and what it implies, a principle of its own, wholly independent of that which merely "is", would be altogether illusory. At its best, morality would hold a secondary rank; but as far as possible its conceptions would always have to be accounted for by natural phenomena. In which direction such a procedure tends has been demonstrated to us by Plato playfully in the dialogue called "Cratylus"¹ where, among other etymological subtleties, Socrates is made to trace back, by an inspired guess, the notion of the "just" (τὸ δίκαιον) to the sun, because as he said, he might regard it, in deference to Heraclitus, as the "piercing" (διαίοντα) and

burning (κάοντα) element which is the guardian of nature"; and where there is maintained to be only this one drawback in that "beautiful" definition of justice that the man who adopts it might find himself in a perplexity when he meets with the objection: "What, is there no justice in the world (that means, no obligation for being just) when the sun is down"? Admittedly, this example is a little crude; but I do not think I must apologize for having selected it, since I believe it is very apt to show what, if not checked from without or brought to a standstill by their own failures within, the exertions of the natural philosophers in the field of morals would ultimately amount to. For what they are constantly driving at, be they aware of their goal or not, I am afraid, is this: their aim everywhere is to prove that, since our several particular duties, that is, the various things that we are obliged to do or to forbear from doing at different times and in different circumstances, are always to some extent dependent on historical and social influences, our duty itself, *i.e.* our certainty of being placed under an obligation as such, must also be no more than a fact that has emerged once at a special juncture in man's past history; and, further, they continuously press towards a

theory of the universe that should be exclusively the result of reasoning, and therefore prove unaffected by moral considerations; whereas it ought to be manifest that our impressions of, and our insight into, the world in which we live cannot be but widely differing according as our actions are right or wrong, that is, according as they are in harmony with the ultimate laws and constitution of the whole, or in opposition to them.

It seems as if these errors of the natural philosophers were due mainly to their overlooking the truth that not everything in philosophy can be regarded as an "object", or a "fact", or an "event". That they feel driven almost irresistibly towards a procedure that would reduce all things to a common denominator, we may understand, if we recollect that their chief design is to get a logically coherent view of all the main features of the universe. It will therefore not be astonishing either when we find that in almost all their systems the soul is conceived, to some extent, in analogy to material bodies, or when we see it given a more or less definite place in the hierarchy of things out of which and through which the world is said to exist. But from that, of course, it does not follow that we ought to

approve of their various pictures of the world. Far from it; for on a closer examination it will appear that they are in a way all equally wrong, because they treat as facts things that are not facts at all. They do not pay due regard to the consideration, for instance, that every attempt, as it were, to locate the soul, must deprive it at once of its free moral choice; and still less do they acknowledge the truth that by these moral decisions the soul, as Plato says in one of his greatest discourses,¹ is able to choose for itself, in accordance with a kind of pre-established cosmic moral equilibrium, its own convenient place in the universe, be it in its heights or in its depths. In itself, I admit, the method of bringing down all philosophical notions to the one level of natural things does not appear wholly unattractive, were it only for the great simplification of all philosophical work that would result from it. But, unfortunately, that method is not legitimate. The problems in philosophy do not lie, so to speak, on one and the same surface, perhaps not even in one and the same sphere. It might therefore be said that there is a certain likeness between the work done in philosophy and that performed by the branch of mathematics which goes under the

¹ *Laws* x. 904 A *sqq.*

name of "descriptive geometry". For as it is the main task of descriptive geometry to represent three-dimensional bodies by figures on the plane, so we have in philosophy to use incessantly logical terms in connection with problems whose implications reach far beyond the logical horizon, as, for instance, when we have to deal with our knowing self, that means, with that part of our intellect that *ex hypothesi* cannot be made known, or with the meaning of moral obligation, or the significance of beauty in the works of art, or with those even still more elusive concepts that are related to the domain of religion. And likewise as it would be disastrous in descriptive geometry, should we mistake in our reckonings those projections on the plane for the projected bodies themselves, so there is no less danger in philosophy, lest we should fall into errors of the grossest order, if we did not endeavour constantly, as it were, to re-translate those logical terms into their supra-logical or truly philosophical meaning. But that is what the natural philosophers often fail to do. They seem to be unaware that there is a symbolism in all philosophical terminology which we can never get rid of, and therefore they do not realize that the idea of a logically coherent system comprising all the main features

of our universe is after all nothing but one of those many will-o'-the-wisps by which we so often allow ourselves to be led astray.

But if this method of reducing things to the level of natural phenomena, as practised by the natural philosophers, is, as I have tried to show, baneful in morals, it will prove to be, as we shall see presently, still more so in religion. Indeed, I think, it would scarcely be wrong to affirm outright that genuine religion and natural philosophy are mutually exclusive. And this for the following reason. To the religious consciousness it is manifest, if anything is, that God is the one ultimate reality in which "we live, and move, and have our being"¹ and that all things are "of Him, through Him, and to Him".² In natural philosophy, again, the chief end is the explanation of the universe. Consequently, if God enters into the reasonings of the natural philosopher at all, He does so merely as a postulate of speculative thought, as a sort of stop-gap or, perhaps better still, as literally a *Deus ex machina*, because without Him the world would not appear to be intelligible. But, if that is true, then evidently the God of the natural

¹ Acts xvii. 28.

² Romans xi. 36.

philosopher and the God of the truly religious man are not the same; for whereas the former could hardly be more than a pale object of thought, the latter is, as has been sublimely put, a "consuming fire".¹

To penetrate still a little further into details, I would venture to say that there are three propositions with regard to the problem of the relationship between religion and natural philosophy that can be asserted without running any serious risks. The first is to the effect that natural philosophy is incompatible with Theism. This, I think, can be shown thus. It is the very essence of the theistic faith to hold the conviction that there is ultimately no other reality besides God, all other beings deriving their existence from *Him*. From which follows as a necessary conclusion the further belief that, while the world is dependent on God for its creation and even for its preservation in any tiniest fragment of time, God must not be thought of as equally dependent on the world, it being *in itself* quite imaginable (though not *for us*, after we have taken notice of the present world and of ourselves as a part in it; but, and this is the important point in the argument, we must not assume that we ourselves are the measure of all things) that He

¹ Hebrews xii. 29.

might have *not* created this world, or have created another world entirely different from that we are acquainted with. But this again no natural philosopher could ever allow. For his mind is so exclusively obsessed with his alleged duty of getting first of all true knowledge of the universe that the idea of a God who is transcendent, that means, who is not connected in the same strict manner with the world as the world is with Him, strikes him as empty and meaningless.—And this leads us straightway to our second proposition, which is that the natural philosopher *may* be a pantheist. This is obvious; for if God is supposed to be necessary somehow for the explanation of the universe, it is not impossible that He be conceived of as a kind of “immanent common ground of all things”, or in some other similar manner. What expression eventually is chosen does, as far as I can see, not matter much, because it is to be feared that none will ever be clear or free from contradiction. For it is not easily credible that the view on the one hand, that God is in some way all in all can ever be successfully combined with the opinion on the other, that He is only one special, however exalted, factor in the constitution of the Whole. But thus it would seem that, whatever his speculations may amount to, the pantheist

will always remain in an unstable position.— And this brings us again straightway to our third and last proposition, namely to the assertion that, for internal reasons, the natural philosopher cannot help being pushed more and more towards atheism. Evidently he cannot stay where he is, because the pantheistic creed, being inconsistent, does not afford him a resting-place. And further, since God is only admitted into his thoughts as a means of explaining the world, and since it is the avowed tendency of natural philosophy to explain the higher by the lower as far as possible, He must appear to him as nothing more than a hypothesis which it is for the present, perhaps, unavoidable to retain, but which the sooner it can be dispensed with, the more creditable will it be for him and his enterprise. Therefore he seems but to be waiting for the day when he can let drop the idea of God out of his mind altogether.

There can be no doubt, from what he writes in the tenth book of the *Laws*, that Plato was fully alive to the dangers that threaten religion from the camp of the natural philosophers. "Their impiety", he admits,¹ "is a very serious matter." Moreover, their whole manner of thinking must have been highly offensive to his

¹ See *Laws* x. 891 C, D.

feelings. For, whereas the religious man bows before the mysterious majesty of God, and is convinced that all the better things in life are above him, the natural philosopher, confiding in his intelligence (or ought we rather to say in his sense-perceptions?), regards himself as a match for reality, and does not even shrink from making God an object of his inquiries. He apparently never pauses to consider whether it might not perhaps be wrong to pass judgement on everything, and the suspicion that his endeavour could be beyond his powers appears not even to have entered his mind; he shows himself impervious to all the critical observations that can be raised against his enterprise; in short, he seems to belong to those persons who, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, "have such a high opinion of themselves and their intelligence that they believe they can measure the whole divine nature by their understandings, through the assumption namely that all that is true which agrees with their minds, and all that false which does not".¹ It goes without saying that characters of such an overbearing disposition are not easy to deal with. But they are

¹ *S.c.G.* i. 5: "Sunt enim quidam tantum de suo ingenio praesumentes, ut totam divinam naturam se reputent suo intellectu posse metiri, aestimantes scilicet totum esse verum quod eis videtur, et falsum quod eis non videtur".

not only unpleasant companions in private life; they also become a danger to the commonwealth in which they live. They undermine corporate religion and so loosen the sacred bond that unites a people. For if, as their doctrine proclaims, everyone is permitted to state for himself, and to try to impose on others, what is to be taken for right or wrong in matters of theology and religion, as if there were not also a common experience on which as a basis religious truth is built up, there is no room left for corporate worship. The sense of awe and quiet assurance, and the feeling of a common inheritance for which all are alike responsible and which is so vital to religion as well as to the welfare of a nation, is then replaced by a spirit of restlessness and never-satisfied research,

As if religion were intended
For nothing else but to be mended.¹

So at length I will close this discussion and proceed to give what I believe to be Plato's final verdict on natural philosophy. It is, as I see it, the following: "He . . . who should attempt to verify all . . . by experiment, would forget the difference of the human and divine nature. For God only has the knowledge and also the power

¹ Samuel Butler, *Hudibra*

which are able to combine many things into one and again resolve the one into many. But no man either is or ever will be able to accomplish either the one or the other operation."¹ Add to this, further, that the natural philosopher "is labouring, not after eternal being, but about things which are becoming, or which will or have become",² and the conclusion is obvious. "Can we say", asks Plato,³ "that any of these things which neither are nor have been nor will be unchangeable, when judged by the strict rule of truth, ever become certain?"—"Impossible."

Impossible.—This, then, seems to be Plato's last word regarding natural philosophy.

But if so, I think, it has also become urgent now for me to say something which I ought perhaps to have hinted at long ago in order to relieve the reader from an uneasiness that probably has grown up in his mind and become stronger and stronger as he was reading: I mean that in this condemnation of natural philosophy no adverse judgement is given on the sciences, that is, on an investigation of nature that is not poisoned by false metaphysical

¹ *Tim.* 68 D. I would beg the reader to notice that it is again the problem of the one and the many that seems to be to Plato the great obstacle in the way of the natural philosopher.

² *Phil.* 59 A.

³ *Ib.* 59 A, B.

claims. There is nothing in the Platonic dialogues that would lend support to such a view. On the contrary, I believe it can be shown that the relations between his philosophy and the sciences were throughout of a most friendly character. For, first of all, Plato is convinced that all kinds of knowledge are valuable, though not in the same degree. "I do not know, Socrates," he writes in the *Philebus*,¹ "that any great harm would come of having them all, if only you have the first sort." For practical purposes, moreover, these minor sciences may even become indispensable. We must know in fact something about nature, "if any of us is ever to find his way home".² And further, knowledge of things natural is in itself no little accomplishment. "All the great arts", he says in the *Phaedrus*,³ "require discussion and high speculation about the truths of nature; hence come loftiness of thought and completeness of execution. And this, as I conceive, was the quality which, in addition to his natural gifts, Pericles acquired from his intercourse with Anaxagoras whom he happened to know." The only thing that we must guard ourselves against in the sciences is the temptation to overrate the degree of certitude and the

¹ 62 D.² *Ib.* 62 B.³ 269 E-270 A.

field of possible application of their results. In themselves the sciences are wholly unobjectionable. "A man may sometimes set aside meditations about eternal things, and for recreation turn to consider the truths of generation which are probable only; he will thus gain a pleasure not to be repented of, and secure for himself while he lives a wise and moderate pastime."¹

That, however, is not yet all. There was in all probability still a further and weighty reason that inclined Plato to look with a keen interest on the pursuits of science. What I allude to is this. He seems to have been fully convinced that, in addition to his interest in mathematics which makes for clear thinking and for preventing fancy from getting the upper hand in his mind, every philosopher must build upon an empirical basis, if his work is not to become formal and barren. It is true, of course, that this empirical basis must not be sought for exclusively in the natural sciences. Psychology, or history, as we might point out to-day, would serve the purpose equally well. But the principle as such is important enough. For suppose that a philosopher is not engaged in any experimental or empirical research work whatever, would he then not be in constant

¹ *Tim.* 59 c.

danger of losing touch with reality, so that in the end he might take the names of things for the things themselves, and, instead of getting day by day new material from his investigations for his philosophical reflexions, might become shut up as a prisoner within the network of his own abstract conceptions?

Thus we shall not be astonished to learn that Plato greatly encouraged scientific investigations in his Academy.¹ There was no enmity between his philosophy and the scientific spirit, or else it would be inexplicable why the great scientists and mathematicians of his age felt the attraction of his school. Nor can I think that it was by

¹ The fact is attested among others by the comic writer Epicrates, who in a charming fragment tells us that the pupils in the Academy

διεχώριζον ζώων τε βίον
 δένδρων τε φάσιν, λαχάνων τε γένη,
 καὶ τ' ἐν τούτοις τὴν κολοκύντην
 ἐξήταζον, τίνας ἐστὶ γένους.

—and that, when they did not succeed,

ὁ Πλάτων δὲ παρὼν οὐδὲν ὀρυνθεὶς
 καὶ μάλα πρᾶως, ἀφορίζεσθαι,
 τίνας ἐστὶ γένους, ἐπέταξ' αὐτοῖς
 (αὐτὸς) πάλιν· οἱ δὲ διήρουν.

But we might gather it just as well from the "diaereses" that are such a special feature of Plato's own *Sophist* and *Politicus*. Finally, the ten books of "Ὅμοια" which Speusippus, Plato's nephew and immediate successor in the Academy, is reported to have written (see *Diog. Laert.* iv. 1. 11), were probably also a study in scientific classification.

mere chance that the scientists of the sixteenth century who contributed most to the liberation of their discipline from the trammels of medieval scholasticism looked up to him as to the great champion of their cause. And finally, I suggest, we may safely suppose that Plato himself was fully aware that he derived no small benefit from this alliance with the scientists. This, at any rate, is the impression conveyed to me whenever I am reading his dialogues. For, if I was called upon to state briefly what in my opinion constitutes the reason for the superiority of his philosophy when compared with that, say, of the Neoplatonists, I should answer unhesitatingly that it consists in this, that whereas Plato took part in the scientific work of his generation, the Neoplatonists apparently did not.

What Plato was up against is therefore not science, but only a science with metaphysical claims whose investigations are carried out for the sake of results rather than for the sake of truth. And this is exactly what, throughout this whole chapter, has been called by the name of "natural philosophy". Natural philosophy is not genuine science, because no true scientist ever regards any of his discoveries as a final achievement. He rather looks upon them as a stepping-stone

to his next adventures, and otherwise is content with the glorious insight into a new feature of reality which every successful investigation affords him, as with a reward great enough for the labour bestowed upon his research work. It never occurs to him that he might lift up the veil from the mystery of ultimate reality, or that he could describe the universe in a manner satisfactory in all circumstances and for all times. And if natural philosophy is thus not true science, it is not true philosophy either, since it attempts to pin its faith on findings of an empirical inquiry, that, from their very nature, cannot be other than provisional. Against this erroneous aspiration of the natural philosopher it might, moreover, be rejoined, first, that philosophy, although it has, no doubt, a close connection with knowledge, is nevertheless not only a species of the genus knowledge and a product of mere intellect, but rather, as Dr. Inge so justly says,¹ the work "of reason, that is, of the whole personality under the guidance of its highest faculty", and that no question of any greater importance will ever be decided on the account of logical arguments alone. And secondly, it might be urged, we do not understand nature aright as long as we take it as an

¹ *Christian Mysticism*, p. 300.

end in itself, and not rather as a kind of ante-room through which we have to pass in order to reach one day, let us hope, our true and everlasting home.

Yet, in spite of all that, there may still lurk somewhere in one of the corners of our minds a certain suspicion lest Plato in a way would be unjust, if not towards natural philosophy, at least towards nature herself. Namely it might be imagined, from the fact that he did not approve of an investigation of nature for its own sake, and, further, from his burning interest in matters of ethics and religion, that he could not have had a quick sense for the beauties of the natural world. But this conjecture, I submit, would be again wide of the mark. For it might be retorted that it is just those sporadic and intermittent beauties which we find in nature that sustain our certainty of, and our longing for, an unending and consummate perfection; and also that it is this conviction of the existence of a higher realm again that gives us the assurance that some of its glories must be found in nature too, because it would be contrary to the essence of the perfect to leave itself wholly unmanifested; and that we should probably detect far more of them, if only we could look at things more from the right angle. That is, at any rate, the answer

that I should expect from any real Platonist. I therefore believe that the late Professor J. A. Stewart is right, when he writes: "Platonism I would describe, in the most general terms, as the mood of one who has a curious eye for the endless variety of this visible and temporal world and a fine sense of its beauties, yet is haunted by the presence of an invisible and eternal world behind";¹ it "is love of the unseen and eternal cherished by one who rejoices in the seen and temporal".² Indeed, Plato did not make of nature a goddess, but he was prepared to find in her everywhere the *vestigia Dei*, or the footprints of God, according to the words of the poet:

Thou canst not miss His praise; each tree, herb, flower
Are shadows of His wisdom and His power;³

and thus, I believe, nature was hallowed in his eyes as certainly not an unworthy domain for our discoveries.

With this I will bring this chapter to an end. It has disclosed, I trust, that Plato, although a sincere lover of nature and a great admirer of science, nevertheless cannot be called a "natural

¹ *Platonism in English Poetry*, in *English Literature and the Classics*, p. 26.

² *Ib.* p. 30.

³ Henry Vaughan, *Early Rising and Prayer*.

philosopher''. We must therefore continue our inquiry and see whether, in our attempt to classify Platonism, we shall fare better with the other definitions of philosophy as given by Windelband in his historical survey.

THE second type of philosophy pointed out by Windelband was the investigation as to the ultimate end to which all human activity is directed. In a philosophy thus conceived it may be asked, for instance, whether virtue is the *summum bonum*, as was held by the Stoics, or pleasure, as taught by the Epicureans, or neither of them, but mere imperturbability, as advocated by the Sceptics. Further, it may be argued for or against the question whether the consciousness of virtue of which the Stoic is so proud does not, when inspected more closely, include again pleasure and happiness, that is, whether it is in the end not just owing to the feeling of self-contentment that virtue is desirable at all; or it may be asked whether not also the Epicurean, for whom pleasure is the highest good, is obliged, when all is considered, to admit that there are two sorts of pleasure, differing not only in degree or intensity, but in kind and moral quality, namely, those of an essentially "base" and those of an essentially "noble" character; and, finally, it

may be discussed, as we have said already, whether it might not be incorrect to describe virtue and happiness as the goal of human endeavour, for their being far beyond the reach of mortal men, and far wiser to strive only towards a state of freedom from our passions, *i.e.* towards a temper from which are excluded alike both violent pleasures and violent pains. All these questions have in fact been ventilated thoroughly by the post-Aristotelian thinkers, and have provided, as was to be expected, the material for a protracted and sometimes heated debate. And yet, one thing is peculiar to all those philosophers who partook in this "strife of tongue": however widely they disagreed in their several conclusions, they all regarded philosophy as a kind of practical training towards a desired end, and they all relegated theoretical questions to a secondary rank as being of importance only in so far as they would serve this primary practical purpose.

Now the question with which we are concerned in this essay is whether Plato would have approved of such a conception of philosophy. In other words, it is the question whether Platonism can be considered to be one among those systems whose first interest resides in a

summum bonum however differently conceived.

That Plato was an intensely practical man, this at any rate might be concluded already from what has been said in the foregoing chapter. For if he had not been so, he would hardly have laid stress on the conviction that the principle of causality is meaningless when separated from purposive action. And the same impression is conveyed by his Seventh Epistle, in which he writes that he thought it to be his duty to go once more, for all his previous bad experiences, to the court of Dionys, tyrant of Syracuse, because, as he has it, he would fear to see himself "at last altogether nothing but words, so to speak,—a man who would never willingly lay hands to any concrete task".¹

That testimony, however, might still appear to be very slender. I will therefore add some more proof for Plato's practical interests by quoting from his disciples, both such as knew him personally, and those who adhered to his philosophical convictions only from reading his books. In the first instance I would point to Aristotle. He extols Plato as the man "who alone or first of all mortals has shown clearly by his own life and teaching how a man can

¹ 328 C. The translation is Professor L. A. Post's.

become at once both good and happy".¹ This saying is truly remarkable, especially when it is remembered that it comes from a man whose mental disposition was widely different from that which it praises. It seems, therefore, as if it was due also to the influence of his teacher, when in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, that is, in a book that otherwise is famous for giving its verdict in favour of the "theoretical" over against the "practical" life, he nevertheless inserted a passage in which he strongly urges not to regard philosophy as a merely intellectual business, but rather as an eminently practical concern. "But most men," he says there,² "instead of doing thus, fly to theories, and fancy that they are philosophizing and that this will make them good, like a sick man who listens attentively to what the doctor says and then disobeys all his orders. This sort of philosophizing will no more produce a healthy habit

¹ "ὅς μόνος ἢ πρῶτος θνητῶν κατέδειξεν ἐναργῶς
οἰκείῳ τε βίῳ καὶ μεθόδοισι λόγων,
ὥς ἀγαθός τε καὶ εὐδαίμων ἅμα γίνεται ἀνὴρ."

² ii. 4, 6: F. H. Peters' translation. Aristotle's words are:
Ἀλλ' οἱ πολλοὶ ταῦτα μὲν οὐ πράττουσιν, ἐπὶ δὲ τὸν λόγον
καταφεύγοντες οἴονται φιλοσοφεῖν, καὶ οὕτως ἔσεσθαι σπου-
δαῖοι, ὁμοίον τι ποιοῦντες τοῖς κάμνουσιν οἱ τῶν ἰατρῶν
ἀκούουσι μὲν ἐπιμελῶς, ποιοῦσι δ' οὐδὲν τῶν προσταττομένων.
Ὡς περ οὖν οὐδ' ἐκεῖνοι εὖ ἔξουσι τὸ σῶμα οὕτω θεραπευόμενοι,
οὐδ' οὗτοι τὴν ψυχὴν οὕτω φιλοσοφούντες.

of mind than this sort of treatment will produce a healthy habit of body." So far Aristotle. From Porphyry, the well-known Neoplatonist and adversary of the Christians, is derived the sentence that "not the tongue, but the works of the philosopher are acceptable with God";¹ and from Eusebius of Caesarea, the famous Church historian and great admirer of Plato, comes the phrase that "we must prefer the philosophy that works through deeds to the philosophy that works only through words".² Proclus coined the expression that "a virtuous man's doing is always in harmony with his words";³ and if somebody should want a witness from nearer home, because he does not consider it wise to trust foreign people too much, let him read Chaucer, and he will find the same idea as before in the lines:

Eek Plato seith who-so that can him rede,
the wordes mote be cosin to the dede. ⁴

¹ *Ad Marcellam*, cap. 16: οὐχ ἡ γλῶσσα τοῦ σοφοῦ τίμιον παρὰ θεῶ, ἀλλὰ τὰ ἔργα.

² *Praef. Ev.* vi. 6, 71: φιλοσοφίαν οὐ τὴν ἐν λόγοις, τὴν δὲ δι' ἔργων προτιμῆσαι.

³ In *Parm.* i. (p. 677, 14-16, Cousin 1864): τοῖς λόγοις πανταχοῦ συμφώνους εἶναι προσήκει τὰς πράξεις τῶν σπουδαίων ἀνδρῶν. We find, however, the same thought already in Seneca, who says (*Ep.* xx. 2): Maximum hoc est officium sapientiae et iudicium, ut verbis opera concordent.

⁴ *Canterbury Tales*, Prologue, 741 sq.

This close connection between theory and practice is, I believe, in fact one of the fundamental characteristics of Platonism. "If we see things as they are," writes Dr. Inge,¹ "we shall live as we ought; and if we live as we ought, we shall see things as they are. This is not a vicious circle,² but the interplay of contemplation and action, of θεωρία and πράξις, in which wisdom consists." A sentence that is more in the spirit of Platonism could hardly be written. And John Smith, one of the Cambridge Platonists, complains that "the reason why, notwithstanding all our acute reasons and subtile disputes, Truth prevails no more in the world, is, we often disjoin Truth and true Goodness, which in themselves can never be disunited".³

Thus it would seem that Plato's thought has indeed a great affinity with the practical conception of philosophy as adopted by the Post-Aristotelians. And this resemblance becomes

¹ *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, ii. p. 231.

² It would be a vicious circle for any philosophy that takes the human mind as its starting-point, but it is not so for a philosophy that has its centre in God.

³ Attaining to Divine Knowledge. See Campagnac, *The Cambridge Platonists*, p. 82. Cf. Professor H. Barth, *Die Seele in der Philosophie Platons*, p. 67: "Theoretische und sittliche Vertiefung sind für die Läuterung der Seele gleich wesentlich; sie können für platonisches Denken nur in einer Einheit des Strebens beschlossen liegen".

still more striking when we consider that, in addition to this practical interest in general of Plato's, he also declares emphatically that the "good" is in some way the ultimate end to which all human thoughts and acts converge. We may remember how it was said by Socrates in the previous chapter¹ that "the muscles and bones of his would have gone off long ago to Megara or Boeotia . . . if they had been moved only by their own idea of what was best, and if he had not chosen the better and nobler part", viz. that which seemed to be the best to him as a whole personality after a careful examination of his conscience. In that discourse we are plainly told that the choice of the best is the ultimate motive of all our actions, or at least that it ought to be so. And why? Let us hear Socrates again. "I argued", he says,² "that if any one desired to find out the cause of the generation or destruction or existence of anything, he must find out what state of being or doing or suffering was best for that thing", and then he adds,³ "I should be satisfied with the explanation given, and not want any other sort of cause". For, as we learn in the *Philebus*,⁴ the "good" or the

¹ See above, p. 25. ² *Phaedo* 97 C, D. ³ *Ib.* 97 E-98 A.

⁴ 60 C. Cf. *Symp.* 206 A: "Then love . . . may be described generally as the love of the everlasting possession of the good";

best differs from all other things "in that the being who possesses good always everywhere and in all things has the most perfect sufficiency, and is never in need of anything else".

And yet, in spite of all this similarity, it would be wrong to see in Platonism only a specimen of those philosophies whose avowed end is the *summum bonum*. And this for the one simple reason that, whereas the *summum bonum*, in the opinion of the Hellenistic philosophers, is believed to be somehow or other obtainable for man, Plato's "good" is considered to be strictly transcendent. It is in his eyes indeed the ultimate motive for which we do whatever we do; but taken in itself it does not enter as the supreme link into the chain of our human ends and the means by which we hope to attain to those ends. The "good", in Plato's conviction, remains for ever outside the reach of human aspiration. What we actually contend for, he says,¹ are "copies" only and adumbrations of that true and genuine "good", but not that perfect "good" itself. That perfect "good" only gives us the necessary impulses for our actions,

and *Lysis* 215 A: "Will not the good, in so far as he is good, be sufficient for himself?"

¹ *Lysis* 219 D.

and from it is derived whatever comparative goodness is in the things we strive after; but that it ever could be imparted to us as such appears to him incredible, since our mortal frame would not be strong enough to enclose and retain it.

It remains for me therefore only to prove that this doctrine of the transcendent character of the "good" was in fact the teaching of Plato. For doing this, I will choose first an indirect method of arguing, and attempt to show how Plato endeavoured to refute the view of those who believed that the "good" was somehow or other an immanent quality. There are mainly three theories, as far as I can see, that went in that direction, whose fallacy he was anxious to lay open: first, the theory, probably of the Megarians,¹ according to which the "good" consists in knowledge; secondly, the theory that the "good" is essentially pleasure; and lastly, the theory that the "good" is identical with virtue. Let us examine carefully the arguments which he brings forward against each of them.

¹ At least *Diog. Laert.* (ii. 10, 2) says of Euclides, the founder of the Megaric School: οὗτος ἐν τῷ ἀγαθὸν ἀπεφαίνετο πολλοῖς ὀνόμασι καλούμενον· ὅτε μὲν γὰρ φρόνησιν, ὅτε δὲ θεόν, καὶ ἄλλοτε νοῦν, καὶ τὰ λοιπά. Τὰ δ' ἀντικείμενα τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἀνήρει, μὴ εἶναι φάσκων.

That the "good" does not consist in knowledge is demonstrated by Plato thus. Knowledge taken in itself, he shows, is neither good nor bad; it all depends on the purpose for which it is used. If it is used for a good purpose, then it is also good; if it is made an accomplice in a wicked enterprise, say, for instance, in an act of burglary or murder, then it must be thought of as equally evil. It is therefore the quality of the action in which knowledge is employed that determines the quality of knowledge. But if this is true, then, consequently, only that knowledge can be regarded as good which is applied to a good purpose, and mere knowledge as such is not to be identified with the "good".

Or, the same might be proven again, in the following way. From what has just been said, it might appear that, although it is to be admitted that knowledge as such must not be identified with the "good", it is nevertheless knowledge of the "good" that might be regarded as the real "good", because it is through it that my actions and the things I use can become good also. For, if the former arguments are correct, it depends apparently on this knowledge of the "good" whether I act aright and whether the things I use are beneficial to me or not.

Deprived of this knowledge, it would seem now as if, on the contrary, all the things in the world and all the actions I might perform are of no value in themselves, since their quality is determined by the quality of the knowledge in accordance with which they are used or carried out. Plato himself probably favoured for a certain time this opinion. "In the use of the goods of which we spoke at first, wealth, and health, and beauty", he asks in the *Euthydemus*,¹ "is not knowledge that which directs us to the right use of them and regulates our practice about them?" And if so, does it not then follow "that the goods of which we spoke before are not to be regarded as goods in themselves, but the degree of good and evil in them depends on whether they are or are not under the guidance of knowledge: under the guidance of ignorance, they are greater evils than their opposites, inasmuch as they are able to minister to the evil principle which rules them; and when under the guidance of wisdom and prudence, they are greater goods: but in themselves they are nothing?"² So that the result would be "that other things are indifferent, and that wisdom is the only good and ignorance the only evil."³—And yet, for all that, it would be very far from correct to assert that this wisdom

¹ 281 A.² *Ib.* 281 D.³ *Ib.* 281 E.

or knowledge is the same with the "good". For if we were asked to tell what, after all, it amounts to, *i.e.* what sort of knowledge it implies,—and this question is unavoidable, since knowledge taken in itself, as we have seen, is neither good nor bad—, then we should be compelled to answer that it means nothing but the knowledge of the "good". But to pronounce in this manner that the "good" is identical with the knowledge of the "good" would be, as Plato himself points out in a later dialogue, clearly "ridiculous";¹ because as an argument in a circle it would not give us the slightest information as to what the "good" really is, but leave us exactly where we were before.

This then may be said to be (Plato's argument against the identification of the "good" with knowledge.) That it is not to be found either in pleasure seems to him evident from the distinction between base and noble pleasures which we cannot avoid drawing.) For, if happiness or pleasure were the ultimate good, then there could be no problem but that we should be obliged to pursue it at any cost; a distinction between different kinds of pleasure would be meaningless. In order, therefore, to maintain that pleasure and the "good" are the same,)it would be

¹ *Rep.* vi. 505 B.

necessary to deny that there are essentially bad and essentially good pleasures, because we should see ourselves forced, as soon as we concede this moral discrimination, to admit that there are pleasures which we may enjoy and others which we have to avoid, and that 'pleasure as well as all else is for the sake of good, and not good for the sake of pleasure'.¹) But that there should be somebody who would deny, not only in theory for argument's sake (for such people there are), but in practice, that there is nothing like bad pleasures, seems to Plato incredible, since it would destroy the very foundations of morality.

Yet with this it must not be assumed that we can already dismiss the hedonistic theory as finally disposed of; for it might be imagined that pleasure and moral notions have no inner connection between themselves, and that there are somehow, as it were, "two lives, one of which is the justest and the other the pleasantest".² But even so, as Plato shows in the *Laws*, the hedonists would not be out of their quandary. For if we should ask them, "which are the happier—those who lead the justest or those who lead the pleasantest life?"³ and they would answer the pleasantest, then even a child, he

¹ *Gorg.* 500 A.² *Laws* 662 D.³ *Ib.* 662 D.

says, could find out their inconsistency and rejoin: "O my father, did you not wish me to live as happily as possible? And yet you also never ceased telling me that I should live as justly as possible."¹

Finally, that goodness does not mean virtue is made clear as follows. Genuine goodness, it is contended, must somehow include happiness as one of its constituent elements, for without happiness it would be incomplete, and therefore, strictly speaking, a contradiction in terms. At least that is, as he intimates in several places,² how it would appear to him, and probably, as he might have felt inclined to add, to everyone else too who has not lost, for one reason or other, his normal share of common sense. Consequently it only remains to be shown that virtue is not always accompanied in this life by happiness. But this, I suppose, needs no special demonstration. It is quite obvious that the higher a man rises in moral perfection, the more he must be prepared for resistance from the "world"; and, although it may well be that his moral accomplishments give him great personal satisfaction, it is nevertheless true that this resistance will debar him from many good things in life, and

¹ *Ib.* 662 E.

² Above all, in the *Lysis*, the *Symposium*, and the *Philebus*.

that, as far as that goes, he cannot be regarded as happy. (Virtue, therefore, can never be taken for the whole "good"; and if it is not the whole "good") (then it cannot be *the* "good" either.) I admit that with regard to the final constitution of the world, (Plato firmly believed that virtue and the "good" could not fall apart; but practically,) in this visible world, they, no doubt, do not coincide. And in the end, let us not forget, our inquiry is about the identity of the "good" and of virtue as we know them here; for what virtue is "yonder" no man can tell. Nor could that question be any longer a problem of philosophy, since it is very unlikely that "yonder" there will be any need left of philosophy at all.

Thus I hope that I have succeeded in proving that the "good" was conceived of by Plato as being higher than either pleasure or virtue or knowledge. It is, moreover, explicitly attested by himself. "I remember", he lets Socrates say in the *Philebus*,¹ "to have heard long ago certain discussions about pleasure and wisdom,"²

¹ 20 B.

² This term stands here for both knowledge and virtue, and not without reason. For it was axiomatic with Socrates that whenever we have the right knowledge, and as long as we do

whether awake or in a dream I cannot tell; they were to the effect that neither the one nor the other of them was the good, but some third thing, which was different from them, and better than either."

The only question that still remains unanswered is therefore what then, in the end, the "good" itself stood for in Plato's philosophy. And with this I turn to the second part of our examination, to what I might call the direct proof of the fact that the "good" was regarded by him as a transcendent quality.

I readily grant that a full and adequate treatment of this question would be no easy matter, and that it could not be attempted within the limits of this chapter. Plato himself, moreover, seems to have been very reticent about it; apparently he was not willing to profane the deepest mystery of his thought; and we know from other sources¹ that his description of the

not lose sight of it, we cannot but act aright and according to the commands of virtue.

¹ For instance, from Aristoxenus, *El. Harm.* ii. 30 sq., where we read: Καθάπερ Ἀριστοτέλης αἰὲ διηγείτο τοὺς πλείστους τῶν ἀκουσάντων παρὰ Πλάτωνος τὴν περὶ τὰγαθοῦ ἀκρόασιν παθεῖν. προσιέναι μὲν γὰρ ἕκαστον ὑπολαμβάνοντα λήψεσθαι τι τῶν νομιζομένων τούτων ἀνθρωπίνων ἀγαθῶν οἷον πλοῦτον ὑγίειαν ἰσχὺν τὸ ὅλον εὐδαιμονίαν τινὰ θαυμαστήν· ὅτε δὲ φανείησαν οἱ λόγοι περὶ μαθημάτων καὶ ἀριθμῶν καὶ γεωμετρίας καὶ ἀστρολογίας καὶ τὸ πέρασ ὅτι ἀγαθόν ἐστιν ἔν, παντελῶς οἶμαι παράδοξόν τι ἐφαίνετο αὐτοῖς· εἴθ' οἱ

"good" was highly puzzling to many of his hearers from the very beginning. Yet, after all, it seems to me not to be beyond human power to state, at least in a rough outline, what the "good" actually meant to Plato, the more so, since he has given us several direct hints about it in his writings.)

(In the sixth book of the *Republic* he describes the "good" in the following terms. It is, he says,¹ "not only the author of knowledge to all things known, but of their being and essence; and yet the good is not essence, but far exceeds essence in dignity and power". In this statement, I believe, it is made abundantly clear that the "good" as understood by Plato cannot be found within the world, but must be considered to be "beyond". And this interpretation is further supported by a well-known passage of the *Philebus*, where Plato writes² that "if we are not able to hunt the good with one idea only, with three we may catch our prey", and where

μὲν ὑποκατεφρόνουσιν τοῦ πράγματος, οἱ δὲ κατεμέμφοντο.
Similarly the comic writer Amphis (see *Diog. Laert.* iii. 1, 27):

Τὸ δ' ἀγαθὸν ὃ τι ποτ' ἐστίν, οὐδ' οὐ τυγχάνειν
Μέλλεις διὰ ταύτην, ἦττον οἶδα τοῦτ' ἐγώ,
ὦ δέσποτ', ἢ τὸ Πλάτωνος ἀγαθόν. Πρὸςσεχε δῆ.

But we know that even to Glaukon in the *Republic* the doctrine appeared to be "amazing" (see 509 C).

¹ 509 B.

² 65 A.

evidently his intention is to say that, since we cannot describe directly the "good", for being transcendent, we may nevertheless in an indirect manner hint at what we mean, whenever we use that term.

It is accordingly only by way of such an intimation that I will now venture to state briefly what I believe the "good" really meant to Plato. It is of such a nature, I would say, that it depends on our attitude towards it whether the things we know here on earth and the action we may perform are valuable or not. For in themselves they are both indifferent; it is only by the use we make of them or by the manner in which we perform them that they become either good or bad in the popular acceptance of those terms. But that is not all. In addition to that significance, the "good" is of paramount importance for us also in so far as this our dealing, either right or wrong, with the perishable things committed to our care has its bearings not only upon the value of those perishable things themselves, but at the same time upon our personalities, that is, upon our souls or that which is eternal in us; although, of course, we cannot be expected, restricted as our knowledge during this life inevitably is, to be able to explain with any accuracy what

these consequences beyond the realm of the finite may be.

I have thus only one more task left to me, and that is to show that this conviction as just outlined was actually held by Plato. But this, I think, is no difficult one. For in the *Laws* Plato has given us, so to speak, a profession of his faith. "You and I say", he writes there,¹ "that while to the just and holy all these things are the best of possessions, to the unjust they are all, including even health, the greatest of evils. For in truth, to have sight, and hearing, and the use of the senses, or to live at all, without justice and virtue, even though a man be rich in all the so-called goods of fortune, is the greatest of evils, if life be immortal; but not so great, if the bad man lives only a short time. . . . For I plainly declare that the evils as they are termed are goods to the unjust, and only evils to the just, and that goods are truly good to the good, but evil to the evil". No further testimony, after this, seems to me to be required.

And so I think I may sum up the result of this chapter by saying that, in spite of many affinities, Plato's philosophy is not merely a philosophy of the *summum bonum* like that of the Stoics, or Epicureans, or Sceptics. For first,

¹ 661 A-C, omitting some lines in between.

as has already been insisted upon, his "good" is transcendent, and not a goal within the reach of the human "sage". And as such a transcendent quality it is a principle of religion rather than of morality. Secondly, I might add, Plato never subjugated thought to practice as it is done by the Post-Aristotelians. It would be a vain effort indeed to try to find in his writings a passage where thought is disparaged in favour of action. In Plato thought and action are always co-ordinated, not the one made subservient to the other. Or, perhaps better still, his ideal is a complete fusion of thought and action to the benefit and advancement of both.¹ To say, therefore, that thought is valuable only in so far as it helps us to reach our practical aims would have appeared to him as equally wrong as to make reason and intelligence, a divine gift, the slave of our purely human ends; it is a doctrine that would have been utterly repugnant to him and that he would never have accepted.

For these reasons we must admit once more that our discussion ends with a negative result. Platonism is no mere practical compendium

¹ I fully agree with Zeller when he writes (*Philosophie der Griechen* II. i.⁵ p. 636) that in Plato "Praktisches und Theoretisches sind . . . schlechthin ineinander".

how to live a morally correct life. Its centre of gravity cannot even be said to be within the compass of morality. We must therefore still continue our historical research. We shall turn next to the question whether Plato's philosophy was not, in the end, religious in purpose, and whether we might not, after all, have a chance of finding out its secret, when we confront it with the great systems of the so-called Ages of Faith.

AT first sight, I admit, it might seem a very unpromising enterprise to embark on a search for common features between Platonism on the one hand and the teaching of the Schoolmen on the other. The two worlds appear to be separated by too wide a gulf for that. Nevertheless, on a closer scrutiny, several thinkers of high authority have come to recognize that there are in fact not a few such points of contact and that some of them are even remarkably striking. "The end of the Laws", writes Professor Ernest Barker,¹ "is the beginning of the Middle Ages", probably because that treatise ends by advocating a theocracy of a very advanced character. Dr. Inge is of the same opinion. "The closest parallel to the State of the 'Laws' in actual history", he says,² "has been the Roman Catholic Church in the days of its temporal power." In the "Nocturnal Council" the Holy Office of the Inquisition

¹ *Greek Political Thought; Plato and his Predecessors*, p. 351 sq.

² *Outspoken Essays*, ii. p. 95.

may be said to be foreshadowed; and although Plato's heresy-hunting is "Elizabethan" rather than "Dominican",¹ there is no doubt but that he approved, in theory at least, of the infliction of the death penalty upon all those who would act repeatedly against the official enactments of the state religion, in so far at any rate as such an infringement of religious laws would seem subversive to the fundamental principles of morality as conceived by him. Moreover, Plato's communism in the *Republic* has a distinctively ascetic ring. "The true analogy", according to Dr. Inge,² "is not between the '*Republic*' and the theories of Marx or Lenin, but between the '*Republic*' and Catholic monasticism." And he adds:³ "Nietzsche said that Plato was a Christian before Christ. It would be more true to say that he was a Hildebrandian before Hildebrand."

I am here not concerned with a critical examination of these verdicts as to their historical truth. I have introduced them merely as witnesses to Plato's interest in corporate religion, and as such I hope they have fulfilled their purpose. And, if there can be no reasonable doubt about Plato's concern for matters con-

¹ See Professor Barker, *op. cit.* p. 367 sq.

² *Outspoken Essays*, ii. p. 89.

³ *Ib.* p. 89.

nected with public worship, there is still much more evidence in favour of his private and personal attachment to religion. The highest principle of his philosophy, the "good", is, as we have seen,¹ an evidently religious principle; and the choice of the best was said to be the primary cause in the creation of the world.² We shall therefore not be astonished to learn from him further that this "goodness" is also the innermost quality of the Creator or "Demiurge" Himself. "He was good", we read in the *Timaeus*,³ "and the good can never have any jealousy of anything." In contradistinction to this divine life from which all envy is banished, "human affairs are hardly worth considering in earnest",⁴ and if, as he says, we must be in earnest about them, it is only because "a sad necessity constrains us".⁵ In another passage

¹ See above, p. 77.

² *Ib.* p. 26 sq.

³ 29 E. Professor Burnet, it is true, denies the identity of Plato's highest God and the "good". For whereas the former, as he says, is a "soul", the latter is only a "form". But I cannot concur with him. For, first, according to what he says in *Rep.* vi. 509 B, the "good" was for Plato certainly not only a form. And secondly, Plato's "divine sphere" is too fluid as to allow us to draw such hard-and-fast lines within it. It still seems to me therefore true that he regarded somehow the "good" as the highest of the divine essences above the souls and above even the "intelligible world" of which the visible one is said to be a copy.

⁴ *Laws* 803 B.

⁵ *Ib.* 803 B.

of his writings it seems indeed as if human life could have a real value, but, also, we are told, only when a man strives "to become like God, as far as this is possible".¹ And further—such is Plato's religious consciousness—, even this endeavour of man to rise to the divine turns out to be just as much a divine operation in us as an effort of our own. "Tell me . . . what is that fair work which the gods do by the help of our ministrations?" asks Socrates in the *Euthyphro*.² But perhaps the most moving testimony for his personal faith Plato has given us in a sentence of the *Apology*, where Socrates, after having been condemned to death for exactly what he believed was such a collaboration of his with the Delphian God, is reported to have addressed his judges with the following words:³ "No evil can happen to a good man, either in life or after death. He and his are not neglected by the gods." And the same thought recurs once more in the *Republic*, where we read that "this must be our notion of the just man, that even when he is in poverty or sickness, or any seeming misfortune, all things will in the end work together for good to him in life and death: for the gods have a care of any one whose desire is to become just and to be like God, as far as man can attain the

¹ *Theaet.* 176 B.² 13 E.³ 41 D.

divine likeness, by the pursuit of virtue".¹

Of Plato's being a deeply religious man, there can therefore be no question; for otherwise he would not have written the sentences quoted above. We may take it for granted, further, that he, no less than Socrates, accepted his philosophical profession as a religious duty, and that he felt almost in the same way as his revered teacher, whom he makes defend his philosophical mission before his judges in these terms:² "Wherever a man's place is, whether the place which he has chosen or that in which he has been placed by a commander, there he ought to remain in the hour of danger; he should not think of death or of anything but of disgrace. . . . Strange, indeed, would be my conduct . . . if I who, when I was ordered by the generals whom you chose to command me at Potidaea and Amphipolis and Delium, remained where they placed me, like any other man, facing death—if now, when, as I conceive and imagine, God orders me to fulfil the philosopher's mission of searching into myself and other men, I were to desert my post through fear of death, or any other fear." . . . "Men of Athens, I honour and

¹ Book X, 613 A, B. This passage is very similar to the well-known words of St. Paul (Romans viii. 28): "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God".

² *Apol.* 28 D, E.

love you; but I shall obey God rather than you, and while I have life and strength, I shall never cease from the practice and teaching of philosophy."¹

Or, if still further proof of Plato's conception of philosophy as of a religious duty were required, I might refer the reader to the *Phaedrus*, where he solemnly affirms that any accomplishment should be striven for by man "not for the sake of speaking and acting before men, but in order that he may be able to say what is acceptable to God and always to act acceptably to Him as far as in him lies".² It could be pointed out, moreover, that Plato dedicated his "Academy" to the nine Muses, and that his school was regulated as a *θίασος* or a religious community. Now it could be objected, and I am ready to admit, that in the Athens of Plato's lifetime every endowment to a public institution like the "Academy" had to take the form of a consecration to one of the deities recognized by the state. Yet, however true this may be, I cannot persuade myself that the Muses served

¹ *Apol.* 29 D. Here again, as Eusebius of Caesarea discovered long ago (see *Praep. Ev.* xiii. 661 B, C and 662 C), Socrates uses almost the language of the New Testament, namely the words in the Acts of the Apostles (v. 29): "We ought to obey God rather than men".

² 273 E.

Plato only for a cloak under which he might carry out a legal transaction. Rather do I feel inclined to say with Hume that "the ancient Platonists, you know, were the most religious and devout of all the Pagan philosophers".¹

Thus it might seem that Plato's philosophy, after all, could be described with good reason as a kind of introduction to religion, or, in other words, as a sort of *itinerarium mentis in Deum*. Proclus, at any rate, was not very far from this interpretation of the meaning of philosophy. He writes that "our whole life (*sc.* in philosophy) is nothing but an effort towards getting a view of the divine".² Yet, on a closer examination, such a description of Platonism would again appear as misleading. There are features in Plato's thought that speak strongly against it.

First of all, there is his deep-rooted agnosticism. He never speaks of a divine revelation granted to man through which he can grasp the

¹ "Dialogues concerning Natural Religion", III; see *Works*, ii. p. 404 (Green and Grose). I am aware, of course, that Hume alluded in this sentence primarily to what we call to-day the Neoplatonists, but no doubt his verdict applies also to the earlier followers of Plato and to himself.

² In *Parm.* v. p. 1015, 38-40; (Cousin, 1864): Πᾶσα τοίνυν ἡμῶν ἡ ζωὴ γυμνάσιόν ἐστι πρὸς ἐκείνην τὴν θέαν.

essence of God as far as his limited mind allows such a knowledge, except in a passage of the *Phaedo*,¹ where it is emphatically affirmed that we have no such secure vessel to rely upon for our journey through the rough waters of life. It is true, indeed, that the thing for which the name of "revelation" stands is recognized in a way, when Plato, in the *Republic*, describes the "good" as "the author of knowledge to all things known";² and it is still more true with regard to the Neoplatonic literature, where the idea that the higher beings "illuminate" those below by letting them have a share in their knowledge and other perfections has become almost a commonplace; but a conviction of this nature that God has disclosed Himself to man at a certain date and in an historical personality, as it is held by the Christian, was alien to all Platonists alike. This agnosticism, therefore, is a fact with which every candid expositor of Plato's philosophy must reckon, and it shows itself in several ways. In the *Cratylus*, for instance, he urges that the names by which we are accustomed to call the gods do not reveal anything as to their essence; they rather explain the feeling towards the gods of those who gave them those names. And it looks as if it was for

¹ 85 C, D.² 509 B.

that reason that he regarded an etymological inquiry into the divine names as an innocent pursuit, by which the gods will not feel offended. "Let us, then, if you please," he says,¹ "in the first place announce to them that we are not enquiring about them; we do not presume that we are able to do so; but we are enquiring about the meaning of men in giving them these names." In the same dialogue he treats with contempt the endeavour of those who want to give an account of natural events by referring them back to certain qualities or activities of the gods. Such explanations are rightly said to be "not reasons, but only ingenious excuses for having no reasons".² But there is, above all, one saying that seems to me to be decisive with regard to this agnostic attitude of Plato's; I mean the well-known words of the *Timaeus*, that "the father and maker of all this universe is hard finding out; and even if we found him, to tell of him to all men would be impossible".³

¹ 401 A. It may be interesting to note that also Schleiermacher taught that theology is not a doctrine about God Himself, but only a doctrine about human beliefs in God.

² *Ib.* 426 A: αἱταὶ (sc. αἱ μηχαναὶ) γὰρ ἂν πᾶσαι ἐκδύσεισιν εἶεν καὶ μάλα κομψαὶ τῷ μὴ ἐθέλοντι λόγον διδόναι.

³ 28 C. Unfortunately, Jowett's translation is wrong here. He writes "past finding out" instead of "hard finding out". The Greek is: τὸν μὲν οὖν ποιητὴν καὶ πατέρα τοῦδε τοῦ παντὸς εὐρεῖν τε ἔργον καὶ εὐρόντα εἰς πάντας ἀδύνατον λέγειν.

It is scarcely to be wondered at when later, among the Church Fathers, these words acquired a certain fame for showing, as they held, that for want of a direct revelation there were great deficiencies in Plato's knowledge of the divine, deficiencies that would probably account also for the fact why, in spite of his deep personal sense of religion and his lofty views about God, he practically left the mass of his people in the same ignorance as he found them.¹ In the *Laws*, indeed, it might appear as if this agnosticism was discarded, at least temporarily. For there we read:² "Men say that we ought not to enquire into the supreme God and the nature of the universe, nor busy ourselves in searching out the causes of things, and that such enquiries are impious; whereas the very opposite is the truth". Nevertheless, I do not believe that this statement can be used for a proof that Plato's religious ideas underwent a considerable change since the time when he wrote the *Timaeus*. For what he is warning against in this passage of the *Laws* is after all, as far as I can see, only

¹ That is also what Josephus charges upon the Greek philosophers in general in contradistinction to Moses when he says (*c. Apion.* ii. 16): ἀλλ' οἱ μὲν πρὸς ὀλίγους φιλοσοφούντες εἰς πλήθην δόξαις κατειλημμένα τὴν ἀλήθειαν τοῦ δόγματος ἐξενεγκεῖν οὐκ ἐτόλμησαν, ὃ δὲ ἡμέτερος νομοθέτης. . . .

² 821 A.

the neglect of theological studies and the indifference regarding matters of religion that necessarily results from it, together with a certain complacency that manifests itself in the refusal to ask fundamental questions; he obviously condemns those who, for certain superstitious reasons, want to exclude intelligence from the domain of religion and are opposed to any criticism of religious traditions by applying to them the discoveries of science. But this does not indicate any serious change in his religious beliefs. He still seems to be convinced that, however much philosophical studies may contribute to the purification of our religious thought, it will never be possible through any intellectual effort of ours, to draw away the veil from the ultimate mystery of religious truth. His final verdict on our knowledge of the divine coincides probably very closely with the words of Critias in the dialogue devoted to his memory: "Concerning the gods, we know how the matter stands with us".¹

Secondly, from what has been said, it must be evident that Plato would never have recognized anything like an autonomous theology, or a truth that is enthroned high above the realms of arguments where no account is

¹ *Critias* 107 B: περὶ δὲ δὴ θεῶν ἴσμεν ὥς ἔχομεν.

asked from the philosopher, and that must be accepted without demur on blind obedience. Even if he had been in a position to acknowledge the fact of a direct divine revelation, it is certain that he would still have urged that, for accepting or rejecting the claims of that revelation, we should be dependent on our reason as the only tribunal before which the merits and demerits of these claims could be examined. That we should have merely to submit to them, and so to divest ourselves of our responsibility as thinking beings, would have been absurd in his opinion. Such an idea could not have failed to arouse in him the deepest suspicion lest it were conceived merely for the purpose of maintaining the convenient belief that there is a "double truth", the one being that of religious tradition and the other that which results from scientific research work; and this is a doctrine which Plato would have rejected outright. Platonism always stands for undivided truth, *i.e.* for a conviction that, though not exclusively dependent on or proceeding from intelligence, must nevertheless be vindicated throughout at the bar of reason, and that must include both religious tradition and the results of scientific investigation. In this regard, Platonism is sharply opposed to the philosophy of the School-

men in general, and particularly to that of St. Thomas Aquinas, who tried to find out a dividing line between a lower field, so to speak, where reason is allowed to explore freely, and a higher field, where it must give way before the authority of the Church. Rather could it be said to have some important common features with Kantianism. For both Plato and Kant are convinced that the starting-point of every sound philosophy is the field of morals, since they believe that it is always in order to know what we have to do that philosophy is resorted to. That does not mean, of course, that Plato or Kant would have wished to restrict philosophy to moral inquiries. On the contrary, both are at one again in their belief that morality presupposes in its turn some religious faith, without which it could not come into its own, and without which it would remain incapable of inspiring us with its high ideals, because they saw that morality, if it did not transcend itself into something higher, would in itself become immoral for glorying like the Stoic sage in its own accomplishments. They further agreed that religion must be constantly checked by intelligent criticism, lest its formulas degenerate into superstition by retaining the letter of a creed from which the spirit has long since flown

away. And so it would probably not be wrong to say that what both endeavoured to promote is a kind of religious doctrine based upon the right moral life. It is true that the two thinkers pursued their goal in a different way, according as they were unlike in temperament. For whereas Plato was endowed by nature with a sense of the "mysterious", in Kant the religious feeling seems almost to have been atrophied. Nevertheless I cannot but believe that Plato would have again whole-heartedly concurred with Kant who wrote in his *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* that "whatever a man believes he can do to make himself endeared to God except to lead a morally just life is hypocrisy and not service but a mockery";¹ and that this sentence represents best Platonic as well as Kantian tradition.² At least it was in agreement with this spirit when Plato in the *Republic* thought it necessary to subject the Homeric tales about the gods to a

¹ "Alles, was ausser dem guten Lebenswandel der Mensch noch tun zu können vermeint, um Gott wohlgefällig zu werden, ist blosser Religionswahn und Afterdienst Gottes" (Part IV, chap. ii. § 2).

² In Plotinus we read, for instance (*Enn.* ii. 9, 15): ἀνευ δὲ ἀρετῆς ἀληθινῆς θεὸς λεγόμενος ὄνομά ἐστιν; and in Porphyry (*De abst.* ii. 61): θεοῖς δὲ ἀρίστη μὲν ἀπαρχὴ νοῦς καθαρὸς καὶ ψυχὴ ἀπαθής. The last sentence shows indeed how under Stoic influence Platonism became more and more ascetic.

severe examination, and when he formulated the so-called "types of religion"¹ or standards of belief, according to which it must be accepted for a truth that the gods are intrinsically good, immutable, and veracious. And when later, in the tenth book of the *Laws*, he tried to widen these "types" by transforming them into the three great laws against heresy, which forbid the belief that either there are no gods at all, or that they do not care for the world and for individual men, or that they can be cajoled by gifts or propitiatory rites or prayers, he was still acting under the guidance of the same ideal and for the same end.

It cannot be denied that these "types of religion" and the corresponding laws against "heresy" mark in a way the beginning of religious dogma in the Greek-speaking world, and that thus Plato may be said to be in a way the first theologian among the philosophers in our Western tradition.² Yet, regarded for themselves, these enactments are ethical prescriptions rather than religious pronouncements. It is hardly credible that Plato would have formulated them had his moral sense not been stirred

¹ τύποι περὶ θεολογίας. See *Rep.* ii. 379 A *sqq.*

² This at least is a thesis that a distinguished fellow-countryman of mine, Professor Pierre Bovet in Geneva, tried to prove in his charming book *Le Dieu de Platon*.

by abuse of the cloak that so-called religious traditions offer sometimes to morally objectionable practices. In matters of pure religion, that is, in religious issues not affected by moral considerations (if there be any), he would scarcely have thought it worth the trouble of the lawgiver to interfere with the popular beliefs. In this respect he was entirely representative of Greek civilization, which, let us not forget, had neither church nor dogma, and which did not care much about a private man's religious thought as long as it did not come into collision with the laws or certain venerable customs of the commonwealth. "If a man", he lets Socrates say in the *Phaedrus*,¹ "is sceptical about the traditional religious stories, and would fain reduce them one after another to the rules of probability, this sort of crude philosophy will take up a great deal of time. Now I have no leisure for such enquiries; shall I tell you why? I must first know myself, as the Delphian inscription says; to be curious about that which is not my concern, while I am still in ignorance of my own self, would be ridiculous. And therefore I bid farewell to all this; the common opinion is enough for me."

This does not mean, however, that Plato did not recognize the great importance of religious

¹ 229 E-230 A.

stories and practices in education. Far from it. He is fully convinced that both are indispensable for laying the foundation in a child's mind of a solid ethical and religious conviction as it is required for leading later a brave and public-spirited life. Only he does not believe that it will ever be possible to insist that such religious stories must contain nothing but the truth. The full truth, in his eyes, can only be found in philosophy, and philosophy cannot be administered to children. For the nursery home, therefore, he thinks, we must content ourselves with tales that are historically false, and true only from a moral point of view.¹ This may look disappointing. I agree; but it is not yet all. Even with regard to adult education Plato was not more optimistic. With the majority of men, he felt, the first childish and inadequate representations of the divine would remain throughout their whole lifetime and never be superseded by something more congruous. And that is the reason, I believe, why he became reconciled to the view that it would be only for a few philosophers to rise to a higher form of religion,

¹ Or with what La Fontaine in "*La Montagne qui accouche*" calls a

"fable
Dont le récit est menteur
Et le sens est véritable".

whereas the mass of the people was to be left in the "cave", provided only that their mythologies, which, after all, were in his eyes not utterly devoid, but rather adumbrations, of the truth, did not clash with their natural moral sense or lead to morally base actions. We cannot be astonished therefore, when, everything considered, Plato did not show the great personal interest in religious rites and customs which we might otherwise have expected from him. In the *Laws*, it is true, he forbids private chapels, in order to keep out superstition and "nonconformity".¹ But for the rest, he simply orders that "the laws about all divine things should be brought from Delphi, and interpreters appointed, under whose direction they should be used".² In a similar manner, I suppose, he was to take over into his "colony" the current beliefs of his countrymen. In the *Timaeus* at least he writes:³ "To know or tell the origin of the other divinities (*sc.* those not established by philosophic reasonings) is beyond us, and we must accept the traditions of the men of old time who affirm themselves to be the offspring of the gods—that is what they say—and they must surely know their ancestors. How can we doubt the word of the children of the gods? Although they

¹ 909 D.² *Ib.* 759 C.³ 40 D, E.

give no probable or certain proofs, still, as they declare that they are speaking of what took place in their own family, we must conform to custom and believe them. In this manner, then, according to them, the genealogy of these gods is to be received and set forth." Now I grant that it is difficult to decide whether in this passage Plato must be taken seriously or whether he is scoffing. But, whatever the case may be, this much seems to me clear from his words, that he did not feel convinced he had to deliver any religious message important enough to set aside the customary religious opinions of his people. On the contrary, he accepted them, although one cannot help thinking only for want of something better, and without enthusiasm. And so it is not possible to compare successfully Platonism with the great philosophical and theological "Summas" of the Schoolmen, because with them the main interest lay just in the understanding and in the best interpretation obtainable of the religious legacy, as handed down by the tradition of the Church.

It is idle to speculate upon the opinions concerning religion which Plato would probably have held had he lived under the Christian dispensation. Such as it is recorded as an historical fact, his theology is evidently unsatisfactory.

But for this, I would suggest, we cannot blame so much the man as the general religious atmosphere prevailing in his time and in his surroundings. Plato's personal religion was pure and fervent enough; that it could not develop into a living and abiding religious institution was mainly due to the shortcomings of Greek religion as a whole. I entirely concur with the verdict on Plato's religion given by Professor Clement Webb,¹ with which I will close this chapter: "In the case of Plato, the task of working out such an interpretation, thoroughly congenial though it would have been to the temper of his mind and the trend of his thought, was hampered by the deficiencies of the religious tradition which he inherited. On the one side the only form of that tradition which might have been suggestive of Divine Personality was on moral grounds unacceptable to him, while that which was free from morally degrading associations was connected with the veneration of the heavenly bodies and the order of the Universe, and so tended to remove the Divine to a distance from the personal life of human beings."

¹ *Divine Personality and Human Life*, p. 281 sq.

THUS there remains for our historical investigation only one more of the definitions of philosophy as given by Windelband, namely the conception according to which philosophy does not concern itself with reality as such, but consists solely in a critical inquiry of reason or intelligence into its own powers and competencies, with a view to justifying any affirmations it might be tempted to make. This doctrine, as has been remarked already, is inseparably connected with the name of Kant. Consequently, if it can be demonstrated that Plato in a way anticipated the Kantian philosophy, then we might be right in saying that his philosophy is a specimen of critical epistemology, and our attempt to classify Platonism would come to an end.

We have therefore to examine whether the view of those who make Plato in some measure a forerunner of Kant is correct or not. The question sounds very simple; but the answer to it, as we shall see presently, is not so easy to give. For in order to be allowed to advance any

opinion in this intricate matter at all, we must say a few words first on the critical or epistemological problem in general, and thereafter specially on Kant and the manner in which it was conceived by him.

Of the epistemological question in general, let me say then, to begin with, that it is almost as old as philosophy itself. In our Western tradition, at any rate, it has become an integral part of our philosophical consciousness in as early a time as that of Parmenides. For from the time when he asserted that only "that which is" can become properly known, and that everything else, that is, everything which is subject to either change or movement, must be relegated to the inferior status of mere appearance and regarded as a shadow only of true reality, it has never again entirely ceased to trouble the minds of our philosophers, and sometimes it has vexed them very sorely indeed. In the so-called Ages of Faith, when ultimate truth seemed to be guaranteed by revelation and the tradition of the Church, it was, I admit, widely neglected. But it was not completely forgotten; it was only, as it were, driven underground for the time being. In modern philosophy it occupies an almost central place. And this, I believe, for two reasons. The first is that the modern mind,

as such, is less concerned with reality as it exists independently of our thought than was the mind of ancient Greece or Rome; it has a strong inclination to reflect upon itself, and to make itself the starting-point for an explication of the whole universe. Moreover, the modern mind may be said to be more self-confident, adventurous, and acquisitive. Its ideal is not so much the self-contained finite form adored by the Greeks, as the unhampered expansion towards something infinite, and it thinks not so much in terms of space as in terms of time.¹ And so it can hardly be astonishing when more than one modern philosopher imagined that, if only the right method in philosophy could be discovered, results, in the future, would come in almost mechanically, and philosophy might then be likened to a harvest where there is reaping practically without end. This, it seems to me, is the first reason why modern philosophy

¹ I think it is noteworthy that this change went hand in hand with the transformation of man's outlook on the universe as a whole. The closed system of the world with the earth as its centre, as imagined by the Ancients, had given way since to the conceptions of modern astronomy, in which space is considered to be practically unlimited. And is not the important part accorded to music in modern civilization and the discovery of psychology as a special science a sign for the fact that the reflexion on our moods and feelings is a special feature of a new mind, which it would be vain to look for among the Greeks or Romans?

has concentrated its efforts so much on methodology and epistemological criticism. The second reason is a less pleasant one; for it does not give us a cheerful and optimistic outlook towards the future like the first, but rather mournfully turns our eyes towards the dark background of the past from whence it proceeds. What I allude to is namely this: it must have become progressively evident from experience that results in philosophy seldom enjoy great stability. What is laid down as the foundation for a philosophical system to-day, is condemned and uprooted to-morrow. And this leads to unwelcome consequences. For, to carry on our metaphor, since the idea of truth allows the erection of only one philosophical system at the same time, the philosophers, for want of an agreement between themselves as to the plans of this edifice, as it were, are still deprived of shelter, and unlike their happier colleagues in other disciplines, exposed to the inclemencies of an out-of-door life. By the discovery of a universally acceptable method it seems now that this disadvantage could be brought to an end at one stroke; and thus it is, I think, not surprising when many a young and ingenious man feels himself attracted by epistemological studies with the secret hope that he may find

the means by which he could free the brethren of his trade from their condition of inferiority, and the occasional feelings of mortification that necessarily accompany it. Add to this that the innumerable set-backs which philosophy has sustained during the centuries of its history could not have failed to produce an ever-growing uneasiness, and at last to shake its self-confidence, and it will be plain why epistemology was bound to be considered increasingly important as time went on.

The historical significance of Kant may now be said to reside in this, that in him this process reaches its culmination point. For him, at any rate, the doubts about the validity of philosophy had risen to so high a pitch that he could no longer help asking himself whether philosophy was possible at all. And the great flash of vision, the fundamental idea of his critical system of philosophy, was the clear insight that this momentous question must not be answered by any previous results of philosophy, the validity of which has already been taken for granted. For such a procedure would obviously be an instance of what the logician calls a *petitio principii*, that is, the fault of attempting to prove a thing by a means which in its turn would still require to be proven. If therefore

the possibility of philosophy is questioned at all,—and we have seen that this question could no longer be suppressed, and still less evaded when once asked,—then this problem, Kant urges, must be necessarily given the first and foremost rank in philosophy, since on any other condition it would, as it seems, at once turn out to be unreasonable. This, I take it, was the actual burden of his critical message.

From this we may see without difficulty, too, why he found fault with the philosophy of Locke and Leibniz, his two great predecessors in the field of epistemological inquiry. For Locke, in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, based his verdict regarding the validity of philosophical knowledge upon the results of his psychological analysis, when he attempted to show whether at all, or how far, our knowledge in philosophy is valid by describing psychologically how it is brought about in fact; and thus he presupposed knowledge which strictly speaking would still require to be vindicated as such. And Leibniz, in his *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain*, seemed in Kant's eyes to err, because he did not criticize Locke's procedure as a whole, but, following closely the arguments of his opponent, only tried to correct, however drastically, those

particular items in his doctrine to which he could not give his assent. Both thus overlooked, Kant thought, that the question as to how philosophy is possible at all must not be answered by applying to it any standard that is regarded as already established; both therefore in his opinion failed, by assuming that philosophy, at least in one of its forms or results, might be taken for granted, to do justice to the universal doubt as to the validity of any form of philosophy whatsoever. Consequently he branded their philosophies as "dogmatic", that means, as surreptitiously introducing into the debate premises that have not yet been established; and he urged that an entirely new departure should be made in philosophical studies. "My design is", he writes,¹ "to convince all those who think it worth while to concern themselves with metaphysical speculations that it is for the time being their strict obligation to stop their work altogether, to regard as undone whatever has

¹ *Prolegomena*, Preface. His original words are: "Meine Absicht ist, alle diejenigen, die es wert finden, sich mit Metaphysik zu beschäftigen, zu überzeugen, dass es unumgänglich notwendig sei ihre Arbeit vorderhand auszusetzen, alles bisher Geschehene als ungeschehen anzusehen, und vor allen Dingen zuerst die Frage aufzuwerfen, ob auch so etwas als Metaphysik überall nur möglich sei".

hitherto been done, and to ask first of all the question whether some such thing as metaphysics is possible at all."

I do not doubt that modern philosophy is put under a great obligation to Kant for his criticism of the method employed by his predecessors, and for emphasizing that another way must be tried. But when we proceed to examine more closely how he, in his turn, applied his new critical weapon, I believe we cannot help feeling disappointed. Kant, after all, was not critical enough. Before, however, I can explain what I mean by this allusion, I must attempt to give a brief sketch of the historical development of the epistemological problem from the time of Descartes, because otherwise it is to be feared that it would be hardly possible for the reader to follow the trend of the argument in the later pages of this chapter.

In a broad survey of the history of our Western thought, it seems to me correct if we consider Descartes to be the first great representative of modern philosophy. For although the opinion might be advanced that the modern outlook on life already found its expression in the philosophy of the thirteenth century, when among others Albert the Great turned his eyes

towards natural phenomena and events, and urged that they should be studied for their own sake, it is nevertheless a fact that until the age of the so-called New Learning, all philosophical speculation was carried out strictly within the frame of church dogma, and that it was not until Descartes that the human mind became, so to speak, the "Archimedean point" from which the world could be unhinged.¹ And if I was asked by what means Descartes effected this revolution in philosophy, I would answer that it was by his admirable resolution to face doubt without any mental reservation whatever, and then calmly to wait and see whether it would destroy our aspirations to knowledge and so free us, however painfully, from a vain ideal, or whether, if it could be withstood successfully, it might not in the end destroy itself. And this is what he thought was the result of his experience. There are three things that will never again be refuted, whatever changes subsequent inquiries may bring elsewhere; they are: first, the philosopher's own existence; secondly, the existence of God or the Absolute; and thirdly, the existence of a reality independent of the human mind. The

¹ According to the famous words: Δός μοι ποῦ στῶ, καὶ κινῶ τὴν γῆν.

first point he establishes as follows. About his own existence, he says, no philosopher can ever actually doubt; for whenever he feels any doubt about anything, in the same moment he cannot but feel that he *is*, because he could not possibly doubt, if he did not exist. Of course, this does not mean that he can be assured of his continued existence beyond the moment of his doubt; the conclusion is not arrived at by any syllogistic reasoning that has no reference to, or is valid beyond, his actual state of doubting; nor does the argument give him the slightest information about what he is himself; it only shows that no doubt *qua* doubt can undo the certitude of his own self as a thinking being.

—The second indubitable fact in Descartes's philosophy was the actual existence of an absolute standard. For only in comparison with such a standard, he contends, can doubt in its quality of doubt, *i.e.* as a sort of shortcoming or want, be apprehended. And should it be instanced that the idea of this absolute standard might be a creation of the philosopher's own imagination, and thus not exist independently of his doubting and possibly erring mind, he would reply that it is strictly unthinkable that an intelligence capable of forming on its own account the idea of the Absolute should at the same time be

subjected to doubts and uncertainty.—And thirdly and lastly, there is, free and removed from all doubts in Descartes's opinion, still another reality, a reality that is not already presupposed as a pre-existing standard, but that has yet to be discovered, although, perhaps, it will never be grasped with full certainty. For if there was no such reality beyond the philosopher's actual doubting self, through the discovery of which he could find a solution for his puzzles and so, as it were, allay his doubts, these doubts would at once become practically meaningless for him, since his mind, being deprived beforehand of any way out of them, could not occupy itself with them any longer.

This, up to this point, is, I think, quite excellent; at least, I do not know anything taught by later thinkers which could invalidate the conclusions so far reached. But I fear we are on less firm ground when Descartes now goes on to assert that, the foundation having thus been truly laid, we can take everything that appears to be equally evident as these three first axioms for equally ascertained truth also. It is highly probable that he was attracted towards this conclusion by his ardent desire to establish the exact sciences on a

solid basis, and thus to get a safe start for a comprehensive investigation of nature; but I cannot help thinking that in accepting it he has grossly deceived himself. For whereas these three fundamental axioms of philosophy were concerned with the mere possibility of knowledge in general, he now alludes to a research that aims at the actual knowledge of particular things, and whereas the three axioms were only indirectly affirmed as being out of the reach of doubt, he now seems to assume that we have in the principle of evidence, or, as he calls it, in clear and distinct ideas, a criterion by which the truth of scientific discoveries can directly be vindicated.

It is only natural therefore that the followers of Descartes were bent on saving the substance of their master's teaching by strengthening this weak link in the chain of his arguments. It could not escape them that mere evidence is a very insufficient standard of truth. For does it not happen over and over again that a thing which seemed to us evident beyond all doubts becomes on a sudden problematical once more, for no other reason than that new material knowledge having been accumulated, we are compelled to look at it from a new point of view? Malebranche therefore tries to replace Des-

cartes's principle of clear and distinct ideas, or of evidence, by the practical maxim that "one must never give one's whole-hearted assent except to those propositions that appear to be so evidently true that one could not refuse it without feeling interior pains and, as it were, the secret reproaches of reason itself".¹ He bases his plea on the argument that an excessive doubt would involve abuse of our understanding, which after all, being a gift of God, that is, of a perfect being, cannot be so corrupt (in spite of Adam's fall) as to err in all circumstances. This, I believe, is very true, but clearly it gives us no certain rule by which we could distinguish truth from falsehood in any particular case. Nor are Spinoza's amendments more helpful. However beautiful his words may be when he says that, "likewise as the light manifests itself and darkness, so is truth its own measure and that of falsehood",² they do not carry us far; for they describe only the way in which truth would make itself felt in us, if it was really imparted; they do not inform

¹ "On ne doit jamais donner de consentement entier qu'aux propositions qui paraissent si évidemment vraies, qu'on ne puisse le leur refuser sans sentir une peine intérieure et des reproches secrets de la raison" (*Recherche de la Vérité*, i. chap. ii. 4).

² "Sicut lux se ipsam et tenebras manifestat, sic veritas norma sui et falsi est" (*Eth.* ii. Prop. 43, Schol.).

us in the least whether we are in any special instance possessed of truth or not. The fact remains that results in the sciences are always only provisional, and that in this respect, at any rate, we have to rely on probability as our guide in life. By emphasizing this truth in an age of rationalistic intoxication, I believe that Bishop Butler stands high above his contemporaries; but since he did not develop the logical implications of this conviction in a special treatise, we cannot say that he has greatly enriched the store of our epistemological knowledge.

It was therefore an important step forward when Leibniz drew his famous distinction between the so-called *vérités de raison*, or judgements about things merely possible, established under the rule of the law of contradiction and of the excluded middle, and the *vérités de fait*, or judgements about actual things, established by experience. With this distinction Leibniz acknowledged in unmistakable terms the rights of experience. He is aware that in the realm of actual things we cannot apply the law of the excluded middle, and consequently neither the law of contradiction, because we can never be sure, when dealing with facts and not only with theories, whether there is not a third issue which we have so far not discovered. Reason ought

therefore, according to him, not to be allowed to encroach on the territory of the experimental sciences by dictating what "must" be; in the world of facts, the evidence of truth cannot but lie in the facts themselves. And, if this is a statement for which every sincere philosopher must feel greatly obliged to Leibniz, there is still another side of his doctrine for which he deserves our admiration in no less a degree: I mean his insight that, although the truth of actual facts can never proceed from reason alone, we must nevertheless cling to reason and to intelligence as the guide for our interpretation of these facts; because it is only by the help of reason that we can hope to bring order into our experience, which otherwise would be nothing but a chaotic heap of unconnected sensations. Since the time of Plato I do not see that this great truth has ever been expressed in equally clear words; and were it for this one rediscovery alone, I think myself entitled to regard Leibniz as one of the great master minds of modern philosophy.

There is, however, one great drawback in Leibniz's epistemology; and that is his unfortunate theory that somehow or other the *vérités de fait* can in the end be lifted up, at least approximately, into the sphere of the

vérités de raison. It seems that on this issue hung for him the question whether philosophical knowledge is possible or not. But if true, this doctrine would imply that experimental probability could gradually be reduced more and more, until at last it might pass into logical necessity or compulsion, and, what is perhaps still more startling, that the actual and the merely possible would ultimately coincide! This theory is therefore unacceptable.

It was left to Kant to correct this error of Leibniz's. He emphasized the fact that the two sources of human knowledge, logical reflexion and experience coming from outside our thinking faculties, are distinct in kind, not differing only in degree, and that accordingly they can never be merged into one another. He further showed that both are equally indispensable for even the slightest particle of our actual knowledge. For merely logical propositions, as he said, would be "empty", as analysing only the meaning already implied in the terms which they contain, and thus teaching us nothing new, and as having reference only to logical possibilities, and not to actual fact.¹ And mere experience would be

¹ I know it might be objected that they *can* teach us something new, in that they occasionally bring to the surface of our minds

“blind”, for being solely collected at random, and not under the supervision of some systematic principle, with the assistance of which it could be organized into a coherent whole and co-ordinated within a single consciousness. If, therefore, there is to be something like knowledge at all, if, in other words, what we call experience shall be not only a sort of storehouse consisting of mutually unconnected pieces of information through sense-perceptions, then it must be demonstrated, Kant urges, how the human understanding can proceed from one impression originating outside our minds to another such impression under a logical rule or a rational principle, because otherwise there would be nothing that could raise our sensations above the level of the mere contingent. It must be shown, to put it slightly differently, how the human mind is able to connect the facts that it finds, but does not create, by such rules of its own so as not to leave this transition from the one fact to the next to be a merely casual occurrence, but so as to turn it into a universal and necessary judgement on the inner connection and interdependence of these facts, or, in short, some idea that was hidden and, as it were, submerged before; but then again, Kant might answer that our minds act not exclusively of their own initiative, but are stimulated by something outside, which sets them in motion.

into what we usually call a law of nature. For thus, and only thus, Kant thinks, can human knowledge become a reality. If therefore he calls the means by which the human mind can order, in the way described, its impressions, by transforming them into such laws of nature, a "synthetic judgement *a priori*", because it connects by a logical bond antecedent to all particular sense-perceptions those impressions that can come into our minds,¹ then it must be comprehensible that for him the question as to the possibility of human knowledge in general was to become identical with the question of the possibility of this "synthetic judgement *a priori*", since both seemed to him to stand or to fall together.

So far, I think, we cannot but feel the highest admiration for Kant's epistemological subtlety and penetration. In particular, his pointing to the "synthetic judgement *a priori*" as the fundamental requirement for human knowledge appears to me to be an achievement of the greatest importance, because by it the character of our human knowledge, as being a

¹ "How can I know that if there is one thing there is another also?", a formula often used by Kant, expresses perhaps in the shortest and clearest way what he was driving at.

kind of experience under the rule of reason, has been underlined with a vigour as nowhere before or after Plato; not even, as we have seen, by Leibniz. But if now,—and here we return after this long historical digression to the point we started from,—we see that Kant holds himself entitled to substitute, whenever convenient, the question how human knowledge in general, philosophically speaking, is possible, by the question as to the possibility of the “synthetic judgement *a priori*”, as if the two were strictly identical, then, I am afraid, we can no longer follow him. And this for the reason that the two questions cannot be said to coincide as such. In Kant’s mind, it is true, they were interchangeable, at least at the time when he started his critical philosophy. But that does not involve that they must be so for any other mind at any other time as well. For this view of Kant’s was, after all, not more than the result of his own personal study of the philosophy of his predecessors; there is not the slightest evidence in it that could suggest its having a final character. On the contrary, all such definitions as to what knowledge, philosophically regarded, consists of can represent only, so to speak, a logical minimum, or something below which we are not allowed to fall at

a certain stage of our philosophical inquiries; but whether they will not be superseded one day by something far better, none of us can tell in advance. To suppose therefore that the epistemological question of the possibility of knowledge in general could be answered once and for all, by showing, in particular, how the so-called "synthetic judgement *a priori*" is possible, and that thus a foundation could be laid upon which later generations might build their metaphysical systems with safety, an idea that was never abandoned by Kant, betrays, I cannot help thinking, a strange strain of dogmatism in the thought of the author and first representative of "philosophical criticism". In this regard the great philosopher of the "Enlightenment" seems to me strangely "unenlightened".

But there is still another reason that prevents me from accepting the critical argument as set forth by Kant. And this reason is perhaps even more decisive than the previous one, because it points to a defect in the application of the critical principle itself. As we may remind ourselves, Kant strongly emphasized that the critical question as to the possibility of human knowledge, taken as a whole, must never be answered by any previous philosophical con-

clusions whose validity is already taken for granted, since we should thus presuppose in part that which has yet to be proved. But if this be true, does not Kant then act himself against his injunctions when he asks, as if they were identical, the questions how knowledge as such, in general, and how the "synthetic judgement *a priori*", in particular, is possible? For does he not so presuppose as valid the insight that human knowledge, from an epistemological point of view, consists in this "synthetic judgement *a priori*", and in nothing else? It is true, the charge of uncritical procedure cannot be brought against him in the same full measure as against Locke or Leibniz. He does not in fact try to prove the possibility of knowledge by applying to the question certain conclusions of his own philosophical system, which for that reason remain unaffected by the critical principle. In this respect his criticism is on a higher level than that of his forerunners. But he nevertheless presupposes some knowledge too; and so, although this knowledge be only such as is acquired through a study of the failures of his predecessors, and not part of his own system, he cannot be exonerated from the accusation of having trespassed against his own fundamental principle.

It would appear, therefore, that Kant's criticism is far from being flawless. But not only that. It will appear further, that the difficulty just mentioned is not only particular to Kant's application of the critical principle, but inherent in the principle as such. For if, on the one hand, we want to adhere strictly to the critical method, as we ought to do, then it seems that we are compelled to ask, merely in the abstract, how knowledge, philosophically speaking, is possible. We are not allowed to make any suggestions as to wherein knowledge actually consists. But thus our investigation will be reduced to the meaningless tautology: how is a merely possible knowledge, a knowledge that cannot further be specified, possible? On the other hand, if we want to go beyond this barren tautology, by venturing to give a concrete definition of human knowledge, before we start inquiring into its possibility or validity, we make ourselves guilty, by asserting that we know what human knowledge means, of presupposing at least in a particular instance that which is as yet to be vindicated, viz. the possibility and validity of any human knowledge whatsoever. There seems to be no escape from the horns of this dilemma.

And yet it would be rash to suppose that, because of this difficulty, the critical principle was already lost. For philosophy is not only a theory, but also a fact or event, operating as a living agency in the minds of its votaries; and with regard to facts, as has been remarked before, the principle of the excluded middle does not necessarily apply. That means in our present instance that, although it might appear impossible from a merely theoretical point of view to disentangle the critical principle from the network of objections in which it seems to be caught, it is, practically speaking, still imaginable that, by an ingenious idea, some hitherto unknown philosopher, perhaps even myself, could discover a third way along which the principle might as yet be piloted out of the impasse in which it was left by Kant. And this is what in fact has occurred. For there have been some Neo-Kantians who affirm that they can see no necessity either for leaving the notion of human knowledge undescribed before examining its possibility, or for defining it surreptitiously by means of results of previous investigations whose validity is already taken for granted, since there still remains the third expedient of giving it only a hypothetical definition from which to start the epistemological

inquiry. And in the critical method thus understood, they maintain not without cause, there would be no flaw; for a hypothesis is not knowledge whose validity is accepted as established. The form, it is true, that the critical examination, according to this new interpretation, would assume is slightly different from that given it by Kant; it would be the following. We should start with the inquiry into the possibility of human knowledge as hypothetically defined. But then we should no longer expect, as Kant erroneously did, to get from our studies a final solution of the epistemological problem, reminding ourselves that we started from a merely hypothetical definition of human knowledge; but rather should we hope that our inquiry, if it was carried out correctly, would lead us on to an improved hypothesis on what human knowledge means, and thus provide us with a new and higher starting-point for a further epistemological study. And in this manner it would generally seem that the critical method, as understood by the Neo-Kantians, was to result in a practically unending course of epistemological investigations, in which we should attain step by step to a better insight into the essence and the implications of what the term "knowledge" stands for.

It may not be without interest to observe at this juncture that these expectations of the Neo-Kantians came true even with regard to the philosophy of Kant himself, in spite of his methodical shortcomings. For Kant, although he started his critical career, as we have seen, by identifying the two questions as to the possibility of human knowledge in general, and of the "synthetic judgement *a priori*", and by believing that the possibility of knowledge as such was demonstrated as soon as it could be shown how the "synthetic judgement *a priori*" is brought about in our minds, soon became aware himself that the "synthetic judgement *a priori*" would never be sufficient to produce alone our human knowledge. He could not help realizing that it can formulate only particular natural laws. But with these we have not yet reached true knowledge. For to do this it is indispensable that these several scraps of information be collected and incorporated in a coherent body of truth. And this result can only be achieved, as Kant now comes to see, when we rely for guidance on what he calls the "ideal of pure reason", that is, the idea of a single consistent system comprising the unlimited riches of all experience. Of course, to attain to this ideal is beyond man, because on the

one hand the facts of experience are innumerable, each new discovery giving rise to many questions hitherto undreamt of, and because, on the other hand, the ideal of unity cannot be fully realized either, since a logical explanation by a single first principle would reduce the universe to one undifferentiated entity, and bring us back, so to speak, to the cradle of philosophy, to the apparently naïve doctrines of the Ionians, according to whom the world was either water, or air, or fire. Nevertheless Kant maintains—and in this he seems to me to be perfectly in the right,—that, in spite of this impossibility to reach our goal, the ideal is to be regarded by our reason as a “regulative principle” or a sacred law, which we must keep constantly before our eyes, and strive to realize to the utmost of our capacities, since it is only thus that our actual experience can arrive at the degree of coherence which it exhibits as a fact. It is noteworthy that by teaching this doctrine Kant affirms, no less than Plato, that we can get the small share of knowledge that is allotted to us as mortal beings only by clinging to a transcendent standard, and that he believed like Plato that our actual knowledge does not deal with ultimate reality either, but only with a reality of a secondary or

derivative character, or with that which we call appearance.¹ But this is not yet all. For if empirical knowledge is possible only on the condition that we recognize a transcendent standard as a law that binds us, irrespective of the consequences it may lead to, then the question necessarily arises how our reason can become practical and lay down such a law which, for being not only a means to knowledge, since knowledge will never be finally reached, must be considered to be antecedent to any particular purpose we can think of and to stand on its own intrinsic merits. Kant tried to solve this difficulty, as is well known, by his famous theory of the "categorical imperative", that is, of a command that is unconditionally binding and entirely independent of all calculation about our human means and ends. But even so his quest had not come to an end. If there was to be such an unconditionally authoritative practical law, he was further driven to ask how we can be justified in regarding the world in which we live as being possibly subservient to the intentions of that law. That such a view is indispensable for us, if we want to obey that

¹ For that this is the genuine teaching of Plato and not that easy-going dualism that assigns to opinion the world of mere appearance and to thought the realm of true being, I shall endeavour to demonstrate at length in a following study.

law as reasonable creatures, is obvious enough; but it is evident at the same time too, that it cannot be established by any knowledge of ours, because we do not survey the universe as a whole nor see the ultimate purpose for which it was created. As a matter of fact, Kant believed that we can attain to such a view, at least as a kind of suggestion or intimation in particular instances and in intermittent flashes, whenever we contrive by an ingenious guess to discover some teleological or organic connection between things, be it in the realm of art or in the science of biology. But this again, after all, shows only how, theoretically speaking, such a view of the universe as postulated by our moral consciousness is possible. There remains still the formidable problem how, from the moral point of view, man is enabled to conceive the world as an organism serving moral ends and not, as it might be, merely pandering to his subjective desires and wishes. With regard to this question, lastly, Kant came to the conclusion that this momentous change of outlook could only be brought about by a kind of "spiritual regeneration". He reasoned that we should not feel the moral obligation as an obligation if we were not so much depraved by nature as to feel constantly inclined to act

contrary to its demands, and that consequently we should be incapable of forming a moral conception of the world, unless a sort of spiritual revolution had taken place in our minds. So that, in the end, it would seem as if the possibility of knowledge depended for Kant on what we might call in religious parlance a change of heart!

Thus it would appear, I think, that the critical principle as conceived by the Neo-Kantians was at least fruitful. But unfortunately there are again two serious drawbacks even in this amended form of epistemological criticism. The first is that, if critical philosophy, as the Neo-Kantians affirm, results in a never-ending process, then it is idle to believe that it will ever bring us nearer to the understanding of what knowledge ultimately is. For where there is no end to be reached, there is no goal either, and not even an approximation towards that goal. And the second is that philosophy, as such, would be reduced to epistemology. For if Kant was right in proclaiming that we are not permitted to raise any other question before the problem of the possibility of philosophy and the validity of human knowledge has been successfully dealt with, and when it now appears that this problem will never be finally

solved, then we could not help being driven to the conclusion that philosophy has for ever to concern itself with epistemology, and that it has never again to occupy itself with questions outside the sphere of logical criticism. In other words, philosophy would be critical logic exclusively; ethical, aesthetical, and religious questions could only be admitted in it for discussion in so far as they would contribute to clarify the logical issue. Add to this that the logical issue itself, as has just been pointed out, is meaningless, since it can never lead to any positive result, and it will be evident, I believe, that the critical principle, when followed the whole length, will leave us with a conception of philosophy that is palpably absurd.

Moreover, the difficulty in which we find ourselves placed by this turn of the critical argument appears to be the graver, as there is apparently no other kind of philosophy outside critical epistemology that can be justified by reason,—for that there can be no return to the “precritical” stage of philosophy, as soon as the critical principle and its significance has once been grasped, seems to me so evident as not to require any further comment,—and as now critical philosophy itself, when viewed closely,

shows itself in the end deprived too of any sense and meaning. It might look, therefore, as if philosophy had become finally bankrupt, and for the philosopher that, since his studies were condemned to be useless, he had better leave them alone and look out for another walk of life where he would probably do something more valuable for himself and his fellow-men. Personally, I confess that I would not condemn anybody who, actuated by a feeling of despair, should in circumstances like these decide on this expedient as a last means to free himself from an intolerable situation, as was done, for instance, by Hume; although to a true lover of philosophy I should certainly give the advice of trying to hold out for some time at least, in the hope that the clouds in which he felt himself enwrapped for the present might clear away, before resorting to so desperate a course. Nevertheless if there should come to him no light over a protracted period, I do not see how we could blame him if he decided to spend the remainder of his days in a profession where he thought he might be of greater value to mankind than when applying himself to philosophical thought.

Fortunately, however, I do not see that by the failure of the critical method as advocated by Kant or the Neo-Kantians we have already

been brought into such a desperate position that a step like turning our back on philosophy must be earnestly contemplated. It seems to me too obvious that mere criticism could never have the last word in philosophy. For, after all, criticism, as is already implied in its name, is a destructive weapon; and from an instrument of negation one must not expect positive results. Criticism may be immensely valuable for pulling down erroneous beliefs and for destroying errors; but the opinion that we could be led by it into substantial truth betrays, I am afraid, a strange turn of mind. Proclus, at any rate, saw better. He tells us that what we want is a philosophy that is indeed critical, but at the same time more than critical, for "likewise as criticism without sympathy would chase away the philosophical Eros and change completely our life, so would sympathy alone without criticism attach our souls to the inferior things of creation".¹ Criticism, in other words,

¹ In *Alc.* p. 427, 2 sqq. (Cousin, 1864): ἡ μὲν γὰρ κρίσις τῆς συμπαθείας χωρίς, ἐκποδὼν ποιεῖ τὸν ἔρωτα καὶ εἰς δὴ τινα ἄλλην περιάγει ζώην· ἡ δὲ συμπάθεια τῆς κρίσεως ἐστερημένη προσκολλᾷ τοῖς χείροσι τὴν ψυχὴν.

The same idea is expressed by Professor Häberlin, when he writes (*Das Gute*, p. 158 sq.): "Die Wege der Philosophie sind manchmal wunderbar. Mittel wird zum Zweck, Methode zum Ziel oder zum Ganzen, Negation zur Position, Kritik zum ethischen Prinzip. Schwäche wird zur Stärke, Unvermögen zum

is a special exertion of our minds which must accompany and permeate all our other mental activities; but it must never be regarded as an end in itself. It is like the salt that savours meat, but which it would indeed be a peculiar idea to serve as a special dish.

Nor is this all. The philosopher who makes criticism not merely an indispensable feature, but the very essence of his profession, is open still to another and, as I would urge, graver objection. For when he contends that the first and foremost question in philosophy is the question as to how knowledge is possible, then he presupposes apparently without further demur that knowledge as such is the indisputable end of all philosophy, as being a value that cannot seriously be questioned, but must be regarded as absolute in itself. For it is only from such a hypothesis that he can vindicate the first place in philosophy to the problem concerning the possibility of knowledge. Yet in doing this, he commits himself uncritically to a prejudice in favour of reasoning, and to the disadvantage of those other interests in man that find their expression in the realms of morals,

Ruhmestitel, Impotenz zur eigentlichen, wahren Leistungsfähigkeit. Man will Philosoph sein, auch wenn man es nicht kann, also muss das Unvermögen so dargestellt werden, dass es als wahre Philosophie erscheint".

art, or religion. He accepts blindly the theory according to which philosophy is a species of the genus knowledge; he does not raise the question whether philosophy might not in the end be something entirely different from mere knowledge, namely something like a walk of life under the guidance of reason only and based upon reasoned truth, that is, on convictions that proceed from our personalities as a whole, and not from our intellects alone, and for which our intellect can give only logical account, but which it would be beyond its powers to create unassisted by those other faculties of the human mind mentioned above. It may be interesting to notice that Kant himself was occasionally quite near to seeing through the fallacy of this rationalism, so for instance, when in the *Träume eines Geistersehers*¹ he answered his anxious cry that "there are so many things that he could not understand" by the reassuring and consoling words that "there are so many things too that he did not need to understand either", or when in the famous Preface to the second edition of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, he confessed that he had "to remove knowledge in order to

¹ Drittes Hauptstück. The two sentences in German are: "Wie viele Dinge gibt es doch, die ich nicht einsehe!" and "Wie viele Dinge gibt es doch, die ich alle nicht brauche!"

make room for faith''.¹ But taken in general, it seems as if Kant was never able to liberate himself entirely from his rationalist bias.

It is quite otherwise with Plato. He was obviously conscious of both the difficulties as well as the limitations of the epistemological problem. With classical simplicity he writes in the *Theaetetus*:² "You seem not to be aware that the whole of our discussion from the very beginning has been a search after knowledge, of which we are assumed not to know the nature". —"Nay, but I am well aware."—"And is it not shameless when we do not know what knowledge is, to be explaining the verb 'to know'? The truth is, Theaetetus, that we have long been infected with logical impurity. Thousands of times have we repeated the words 'we know' and 'do not know' and 'we have or have not science or knowledge', as if we could understand what we are saying to one another, so long as we remain ignorant about knowledge; and at this moment we are using the words 'we understand', 'we are ignorant', as though we could still employ them when deprived of knowledge or science".—"But if you avoid these expressions, Socrates,

¹ "Ich musste . . . das Wissen aufheben, um zum Glauben Platz zu bekommen."

² 196 D-197 A.

how will you ever argue at all?"—"I could not, being the man I am."—The greatness of this passage, I believe, lies in this, that it ungrudgingly allows for the fact that the epistemological problem is indeed a veritable problem, and not merely a sham problem that can be disposed of before we approach our further tasks, or that may be used, as it was by Kant, for a sort of back door simply leading again to another system of philosophy.¹ Plato took it seriously;

¹ The great mistake by which Kant was enabled to build up a system of philosophy at all was that, whereas he rightly insisted on the fact that in all scientific knowledge, that is, in all knowledge which is intended to deal with reality, mere logical forms would be as "empty" as mere sense-perceptions would be "blind", he nevertheless thought that he could lay down once for all all those "pure forms" of thought on which subsequent philosophy was to be based. He does not seem to have become aware that this doctrine would involve the awkward conclusion that philosophy could then have nothing at all to do with facts. It further led him to the dangerous assumption that by a kind of introspection into our minds we can find out the whole system of "forms" or "categories" by which our intellect is able to connect sense-perceptions, as if it is not only when dealing with these sense-perceptions that we can become conscious of our thoughts by the help of which we try to interpret them. Similarly in morals, Kant believed that in finding the so-called "categorical imperative", *i.e.* the pure form of moral command, he had made an important discovery. He apparently did not realize that from this empty form he could never conclude what he had to do in a concrete situation, since there is, strictly speaking, not a single action in the whole world that might not become either right or wrong according to circumstances. But perhaps still more startling is Kant's doctrine that art, in contradistinction to biology, which is said to have in addition to the characteristics

he does not even shrink from admitting that in a way it is insoluble,—namely, as long as we presume that what we want in philosophy is final results,—and that it is well for us that it is so, because we are thus obliged to remain alive to the dangers that threaten our assertions and are so prevented from making rash and sweeping statements and from lapsing into dogmatism and intolerance.

Therefore, to sum up, instead of making Plato an early herald of Kantianism, it seems to me that it would be far more appropriate to acknowledge that Platonism is something more comprehensive and apparently more critical than all modern epistemology taken together, and that even Kant, although he came in many ways near Plato, nevertheless remained, if we consider his philosophy as a whole, a good way behind. Consequently, instead of trying to understand Platonism by applying to it the

of art an objective counterpart, is the mere formal congruity and interplay of our various mental faculties, as if art had not also its roots in reality, and his view that the work of the biologist is essentially artistic, whereas that of the mathematician or physicist is apparently not! And lastly, Kant went so far as to affirm that there is something like a religion based on mere reason, in comparison with which any historical religion could at its best be only a sort of elementary school preparing the hearts and minds of men for its acceptance, and which in the end could be no other than his own philosophy! From all these extravagances Platonism, fortunately, is entirely free.

standards of Kant's criticism, I believe that it would be far better to make an attempt to describe Kantianism in Platonic terms, if only we already knew what Platonism actually means.

ALL our endeavours to classify Platonism under one of Windelband's four heads, and to vindicate it as a specimen of either natural, pragmatical, scholastic, or critical philosophy, have thus broken down alike. With each of these philosophical schools Platonism has certain things in common; and yet, as a whole, it is an instance of none. It seems therefore as if we had now better give up our historical approach to it and try, however difficult it may be, to find out directly, through Plato's own writings, what can be said to be the distinctive feature of his thought.

At this critical turning-point of our inquiry it may prove useful if we recall to our minds an argument that has been put forward at the beginning of this study, and in which it was intimated that, although we may succeed in describing historically what philosophy meant to its classical representatives, it should not be overlooked that, from a systematic point of view, any rigid definition of philosophy is to be received with suspicion, since it would necessarily

impair both the philosopher's freedom of thought and his sense of intellectual responsibility, by confining his work from the very outset to a certain limited area within fixed boundaries. For what if, in the end, Platonism should turn out to be characterized by just this special mark, that it refuses deliberately to accept any such definition of philosophy in the interest of the better discharge of the practical duties laid upon the philosopher by his profession? Would such an attitude in itself be unreasonable? I do not think so. For after all, what would it help, if I knew what philosophy is, but should not act in accordance with its demands? Would not such a knowledge be comparable to that faith which, for being without works, is declared by the Apostle to be dead like a body without its animating spirit?¹

As a matter of fact, it is from this angle that I believe we have the best chance of penetrating the mystery of Platonism. But it is not only the definition of philosophy, I would say, that Plato thinks lightly of; it is results in general, in contradistinction to what we may call the preservation of the philosophical character in the philosopher, that are regarded by him as being of a merely secondary value. It seems that he

¹ Cf. James ii. 26.

was convinced that results would look after themselves and present themselves in due time, if only the philosopher would keep faithful to his philosophical vocation. What therefore became to him of outstanding importance was the recognition of the practical duty imposed on the philosopher as such, independent of any consequences to which it might lead.

For, to put it bluntly, philosophy meant to Plato not a doctrine, still less a metaphysical system. He was fully aware of the obvious truth that final results are beyond man, and therefore not to be looked for in philosophy. Hence he can only find scorn for all those who vindicate for themselves an infallible authority and the right to speak and teach, as it were, *ex cathedra*. Such arrogant and overbearing behaviour is, in his eyes, quite irreconcilable with the character of a genuine philosopher. For in his opinion philosophy is essentially nothing but a sincere love of truth, and a relentless striving after it, as far as this is compatible with our mortal frames; and the only true philosopher is he, who, as a humble seeker after truth, does not presume "to have apprehended" already, but is always "reaching forth unto those things which are before".¹ He accordingly compares the

¹ Cf. Phil. iii. 13.

philosopher in the *Apology* with a sentry on his watch, who must keep his eyes open and is not allowed to let anything escape his notice, and who must hold out on his post until he is relieved by higher authority; and in the *Republic* he likens him to a watchdog, who knows that he is responsible for those in the house, and is obliged to give his warning at the approach of even the slightest danger.¹

It goes without saying that such an unpresuming conception of philosophy is not much favoured either by those who, being afraid of the universe surrounding them, would wish that there was some general science by which man could determine once for all what the world he lives in ultimately is, so as not to be confronted any longer with the possibility of unpleasant surprises; or by those who, being inflated with vanity, would like to give themselves airs by posing as if they knew, being philosophers, something concerning the final constitution of things to which the ordinary man, through his merely empirical research work, had no access. It would appear from his dialogues that Plato was a good deal molested by such people, mainly by those of the latter

¹ It seems to me highly interesting that Ezekiel had a very similar idea of his prophetic office. See iii. 15-21.

kind, but that he was not greatly impressed by the strength of their arguments. He calls them "sophists", thus intimating that he regards them as philosophers falsely so called. For the rest he does not trouble himself overmuch with them. May they teach whatever they like—which, by the way, they do at their own risk,—he for himself is resolved to keep faithfully to the interpretation of philosophy as of a walk of life, a walk which man can follow as long as he thinks and acts correctly, and from which he may get a vision of the truth, which, although it be not perfect and lasting, yet affords him all that he needs according to time and circumstances; but which he would lose at once if he was to give up his vigilance and neglect his philosophical duty of being open to all questions from whatever quarter they may arise, and of acting in conformity with the best knowledge he can get hold of.¹

It may not be uninteresting to observe that the validity of this Platonic theory on the essence of philosophy is in a way borne out even by experience. For if there is, as there is

¹ It could also be said that Plato did not believe in a *philosophia triumphans* or a metaphysical oracle, by which we could get information of things almost before thinking about them, but only recognized a *philosophia militans*, i.e. an active service under the banner of the idea of truth.

in fact, something like a brotherhood of true philosophers who, for all their disagreements with regard to particular questions, nevertheless feel drawn together as partakers in one and the same spiritual adventure, does this not indicate that the deepest thing in philosophy is not the conclusions that we may arrive at, but rather the very resolution to lead a philosophical life, *i.e.* the decision not to accept without examination any traditional beliefs and customs, but to try throughout to give an account before the tribunal of our moral and intellectual conscience for every step we may decide to take during our pilgrimage through this life?

In this laying of stress on the right moral character of the philosopher as on the thing that matters most in philosophy, then, we may see, I believe, a first important characteristic of Plato's philosophical thought. But scarcely less significant seems to me to be his great realization that there would be no philosophy if there were no ignorance in the world. For if this statement be true,—and I do not see how it can be disputed,—then it is no longer permissible to regard philosophy as a luxury or work of supererogation, in which the more intelligent members of the rich and leisured classes may

indulge for an elegant pastime, as appears to have been held, among others, by Aristotle; but rather does it then become a most urgent cure for a most widespread evil, of which almost all men stand in the same dire need. It is true, of course, that from a historical point of view, it was only "when almost all the necessities of life and the things that make for comfort and recreation had been secured", that such philosophical "knowledge began to be sought";¹ but this does not imply that Plato is forced also to endorse, together with the fact, the interpretation given it by Aristotle; on the contrary, he might well take it for nothing more than an additional instance of the lamentable truth that men in general are very prompt in their efforts to alleviate their physical wants and shortcomings, but do not show any hurry when called upon to free themselves from their mental deficiencies.

That philosophy is inseparably connected with the consciousness of comparative ignorance has been illustrated by Plato in the *Symposium*, by his famous mythical story of the "Birth of Eros". There we are told that "Eros", the driving force in philosophy, is son to "Poros" or "Resourcefulness", as well as to "Penia" or

¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* i. 982 b 22-24. Professor Ross's translation.

"Want", and that he inherited from both his parents their distinctive qualities. As the son of his mother, "Eros" therefore is "always poor, and anything but tender and fair, as the many imagine him; and he is rough and squalid, and has no shoes, nor a house to dwell in." . . . On the other hand, in order to cure his want, he is, like his father, "always plotting against the fair and good; he is bold, enterprising, strong, a mighty hunter, always weaving some intrigue or other."¹ . . . Here again we must not be surprised when we notice that this picture is not to the taste of some of our more fastidious metaphysicians; they do not like to be conversant with a vagabond or tramp like this; and that is the reason why they have invented an apocryphal tale as a sequel to this story, by which they hoped to rid themselves of those rather perturbing features in the character of poor philosophical "Eros", namely the tale that this homeless boy, who for want of a shelter, was erring, as it were, all over the world, in the end was adopted, to use a mode of expression familiar from Bunyan, by rich Mrs. Knowledge or noble Lady Science, and so still became a well-behaved young gentleman as is acceptable with fashionable society.

¹ 203 C, D.

This tale, undoubtedly, sounds not a little edifying. The only drawback is that we hear nothing of it from Plato himself, so that it is greatly to be feared that, after all, it is based on pure invention, if we are not even compelled to brand it, from the point of view of philosophical orthodoxy, as rank heresy.

Thus it would appear as a second distinctive mark of Platonism that, according to its teaching, philosophy does not mean so much the attempt of getting a coherent view of the universe, as an implacable crusade against error and ignorance wherever they may be found, and that the initiative in philosophy does not lie with the philosopher, but rather with the fact, pleasant or unpleasant, that there is ignorance in the world. "We say", Plato writes in the *Lysis*,¹ "that those who are already wise, whether Gods or men, are no longer lovers of wisdom; nor can they be lovers of wisdom who are ignorant to the extent of being evil, for no evil or ignorant person is a lover of wisdom. There remain those who have the misfortune to be ignorant, but are not yet hardened in their ignorance, or void of understanding, and do not as yet fancy that they know what they do not know: and therefore those who are the lovers of wisdom are as yet neither good

¹ 218 A, B.

nor bad." And in the *Symposium* almost the same words reappear. "No god", we read there,¹ "is a philosopher or seeker after wisdom, for he is wise already; nor does any man who is wise seek after wisdom. Neither do the ignorant seek after wisdom. For herein is the evil of ignorance, that he who is neither good nor wise is nevertheless satisfied with himself: he has no desire for that of which he feels no want.—But who then, Diotima . . . are the lovers of wisdom, if they are neither the wise nor the foolish?—A child may answer that question . . .; they are those who are in a mean between the two."

I am naturally quite aware that this doctrine of Plato's, which, so to speak, makes of philosophy a remedy against the evil of ignorance, is not very likely to escape criticism. There are, if I am not mistaken, at least two objections that will be raised against it. The first of them is to the effect that philosophy, if made to be chiefly concerned with fighting against ignorance and error, will lose its direct positive value, being reduced, as will be complained, to the condition of a merely necessary evil. And the second is that the task of the philosopher will needs become uninspiring and uninteresting, if he

¹ 203 E-204 A.

has in fact nothing more to do than to deal with the intellectual deficiencies in the minds of individual men.

But both these objections, I would hold, are not well founded. For, as to the first, it might be replied that philosophy, although it is likely to be felt at first as a necessary evil, must not necessarily continue to be regarded as such, it being a well-known experience that evil in this world can be turned into good. It is therefore not at all unimaginable that philosophy, although its immediate practical aim, apart from which it would not come into being, be only the destruction of human errors, may nevertheless conduce in the end to results that are valid much farther than they were believed to be at the occasion on which they have been discovered, and may thus open a view on something much grander than was to be expected from its humble beginnings. It would, I believe, not involve a contradiction even to expect that philosophy, although it starts in no more than the fight against human weakness, will finally be consummated in a vision of the divine. For if there are people who have set themselves apart for the special purpose of combating ignorance, be it found in themselves or in others, and if this decision of theirs proceeds from a firm conviction

that this endeavour, if carried out faithfully, has a lasting ethical and religious significance, are we to be astonished when we see this faith to find its adequate expression and, as it were, to break forth, whenever it finds an opportunity of manifesting itself by being practically applied to a particular test?

In this way, I suggest, the first objection can be disposed of. And the second, I think, is not more difficult to obviate. For to a man who should urge that philosophy was to become too easy because of dealing only with human ignorance, I believe that it would be appropriate to answer that he probably never made any serious effort to think out what human ignorance really means. He would have to be told that ignorance must not be regarded only as a certain lack of theoretical knowledge about matters of fact, but rather as the initial stage of a general depravation of which there is practically no limit. For ignorance clearly does not mean merely that I do not happen to know things of which I might have been informed in more propitious circumstances; ignorance always includes an inherent sinister tendency to develop into the erroneous belief, based on presumption, that I know what I actually do not know. This, at least, is how the Platonists saw ignorance,

and why they distinguished carefully between "simple ignorance", or mere want of information, and "double ignorance", or absence of knowledge coupled with the illusion of being possessed of it. "Ignorance", says Plato in the *Laws*,¹ "may be conveniently divided by the legislator into two sorts: there is simple ignorance, which is the source of lighter offences, and double ignorance, which is accompanied by a conceit of wisdom; and he who is under the influence of the latter fancies that he knows all about matters of which he knows nothing." And in the *Sophist* he writes:² "We can discover a line which divides ignorance into two halves. . . . I do seem to myself to see one very large and bad sort of ignorance which is quite separate, and may be weighed in the scale against all other sorts of ignorance put together.—What is it?—When a person supposes that he knows, and does not know; this appears to be the great source of all the errors of the intellect."³

¹ 863 c.² 229 B, C.

³ The same doctrine is expounded by Plotinus, when he says (*Enn.* v. 5. 1): εἰ μὲν οὖν εἰδήσει, ὅτι τὰ ψευδῇ ἔχει, ὁμολογήσει ἄμοιρος ἀληθείας εἶναι· εἰ δὲ καὶ τοῦτο ἀγνοήσει, καὶ οἰήσεται τὸ ἀληθὲς ἔχειν οὐκ ἔχων, διπλάσιον ἐν αὐτῷ τὸ ψεῦδος γένόμενον πολὺ τῆς ἀληθείας αὐτὸν ἀποστήσει; and by Proclus, who writes (*In Alc.* 481, 19 sqq.; Cousin, 1864): εἰ δὲ καὶ οὐκ ἴσμεν καὶ οὐκ οἰόμεθα γινώσκειν, ἀπλῆν ἀγνοίαν· εἰ δὲ καὶ οὐκ ἴσμεν καὶ οἰόμεθα γινώσκειν, διπλῇ ἀμαθαίνομεν.

Moreover, ignorance cannot be kept within the boundaries of only theoretical aspirations. It invariably causes grave mistakes in practice also. For the man who believes he knows, though in reality he does not, both attempts to do things for which he is not competent, and keeps out those who would be qualified for the task, the result being that he blunders. Nor does the matter stop there. Ignorance, it may be pointed out, enters even the realms of art by sophisticating the artist's imagination; and in religion it is known under the odious name of hypocrisy. It is therefore a danger for our whole spiritual life. And further, if this be true for our individual existence, then it is still more so with regard to the life of a social community or a state. The wretchedness of a commonwealth that is administrated by such "doubly-ignorant" men indeed can, I believe, hardly be exaggerated. Hence it seems to me highly suggestive, when we are told by Plato in the *Laws*¹ "that not cowardice was the cause of the ruin of the Dorian kings and of their whole design, nor ignorance of military matters, either on the part of the rulers or of their subjects", but that "their misfortunes were due to their general degeneracy, and especially to their ignorance of the most

important human affairs"; and when he continues with the exhortation:¹ "Let us, then, in the first place declare and affirm that the citizen who does not know these things ought never to have any kind of authority entrusted to him: he must be stigmatized as ignorant, even though he be versed in calculation and skilled in all sorts of accomplishments, and feats of mental dexterity; and the opposite are to be called wise, even although, in the words of the proverb, they know neither how to read nor how to swim; and to them, as to men of sense, authority is to be committed."

But by far the worst feature of this "double ignorance" is that, on the one hand, it stands in the way of its own cure, and on the other, if unchecked, it is constantly aggravating itself. For if we look at things with a distorted view, these things will present themselves to us in a distorted manner too; and thus, instead of reaping from our experiences new impressions which might help us in restoring a healthy spirit within ourselves, we shall only add nourishment to the ulcer within our mind. And on the other side, if we should try to cure our ignorance, we see that for so doing it is required that we look away from ourselves and from our habitual

¹ *Ib.* 689 c, d.

ways of thinking, which seems to us tantamount to a flat repudiation of our very selves and consequently impossible. Therefore it is not surprising when Plato calls ignorance the "greatest of diseases",¹ and when he connects it directly with the worst of human vices, man's immoderate love of himself. "Of all evils", he says,² "the greatest is one which in the souls of most men is innate, and which a man is always excusing in himself and never correcting; I mean, what is expressed in the saying that 'Every man by nature is and ought to be his own friend'. Whereas the excessive love of self is in reality the source to each man of all offences; for the lover is blinded about the beloved, so that he judges wrongly of the just, the good, and the honourable, and thinks that he ought always to prefer himself to the truth. But he who would be a great man ought to regard, not himself or his interests, but what is just, whether the just act be his own or that of another. Through a similar error men are induced to fancy that their own ignorance is wisdom, and thus we who may be truly said to know nothing, think that we know all things; and because we will not let others act for us in what we do not know, we are compelled to act amiss ourselves. Wherefore let every man avoid

¹ *Tim.* 88 B.² *Laws* 731 D-732 B.

excess of self-love, and condescend to follow a better man than himself, not allowing any false shame to stand in the way." Yet this is just what self-love forbids us to do. Accordingly, if we are to be delivered from this evil at all, deliverance must come from outside; for left to ourselves and to our vanity, we do not want to be cured, and our soul is "wallowing in the mire of every sort of ignorance and by reason of lust becomes the principal accomplice in her own captivity".¹

This, then, is Plato's account of ignorance from which he says that philosophy has to rescue men. Viewed in this light, it will appear that ignorance is not the harmless thing as which it may present itself to a first superficial glance, but rather that fundamental corruption in which as it is said "all evils are rooted, and from which they germinate and afterwards produce the most bitter fruit".² Nor will it thus be altogether astonishing when the late Professor Constantin Ritter believed that Plato saw in ignorance something like the "blasphemy against the Holy Ghost",³ or when Malebranche, "le

¹ *Phaedo* 82 E.

² *Ep.* vii, 336 B. The translation is from Sydenham and Taylor.

³ *Die Kerngedanken der platonischen Philosophie*, p. 263, note 3.

Platon Chrétien" as he is often called, opens his famous *Recherche de la Vérité* with the words that "Error is the cause of human misery; it is the principle of wickedness that has produced the evil of this world".¹

And so I am convinced that the argument of those who would imagine that, for having to do merely with human ignorance, philosophy was to become too easy an undertaking has completely failed. Rather would it seem to be true when we affirm, in view of the abundance and great variety of ignorance, and in view of the difficulty inseparable from the endeavour to make men see their own delusions, that its task is almost superhuman. "The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few",² one feels tempted to exclaim once more in face of this situation; and it might be emphasized further that considering this disproportion between the immense work incumbent on philosophy, and the insignificant number of those who strive to cope with it, it is not to be wondered at when philosophy does not exercise a greater influence on the affairs of the world than it actually does.

But this is not the place to complain of the

¹ "L'erreur est la cause de la misère des hommes; c'est le mauvais principe qui a produit le mal dans le monde."

² Luke x. 2.

scarcity of fellow-workers in philosophy, justified though this complaint otherwise would be. Here we are engaged in an "academic" study on Plato's conception of philosophy, and accordingly are concerned with theoretical questions only, and not with practical exhortations.

The next problem, therefore, with which we have to grapple is the question as to what qualities are required of the philosopher in order that he may free his fellow-men from ignorance as understood by the Platonists. I am afraid this inquiry will bring us into some deep water; but since it is so intimately connected with our principal aim, which is to find out how Plato conceived of philosophy, we are not permitted to evade its difficulties. I would therefore ask the reader to be patient with regard to the discussion which is to follow; and I believe that I dare do so the more as I can assure him that I shall endeavour also to express myself as clearly and simply as the matter seems to allow.

The first quality, then, that is demanded of the philosopher is, I would say, that he be free himself from that "double ignorance" or the presumption to know where he actually does not know. That, in fact, goes almost without

saying; but the consequences that it involves are none the less far-reaching. For in order to be free from such presumption, it seems that the love of truth and the passion for seeing things as they really are, whether they be agreeable to him or not, must have become so strong in the philosopher that no interest in any other part of life can any longer seriously interfere with it. The philosopher's mind, in other words, must be fixed, as it were, on truth; for otherwise he would not be proof either against self-deception. Plato knew this well; for this, I believe, was the reason why he laid so great stress, as we have seen, on the moral character of the philosopher as on the thing on which ultimately everything in philosophy would depend, and in comparison with which every solution of a particular problem could not appear but insignificant.

I think it highly probable that this passion for truth is kindled in a philosopher only then, when he sees it at work in another philosopher, with whom he has either become personally acquainted, or with whose writings at least he is familiar. For this ideal seems to be a gift from above. It is hardly imaginable that a man could find it unassisted within himself, and to make it his guiding star for life, without being

inspired from outside by the living example of a master. In short, it is very unlikely that the torch of philosophy is lighted by ourselves and not merely handed on. And I would add that it is good for us that it is so; for otherwise it is to be feared that the freedom of mind, which is the result of every genuine philosophy, would be turned into spiritual pride or that evil, than which, according to Bradley, "there is no sin, however prone to it the philosopher may be, which philosophy can justify so little",¹ and thus would become the cause of a comprehensible resistance from the part of the public against anything that savours of it.

But granted that this passion for truth is a living agency in a philosopher, and that it is not accompanied by spiritual pride, how is he practically to undeceive a fellow-man from ignorance? For this, I believe, two things in the first instance are required. One of them is that the philosopher be able to win the confidence of his interlocutor. That sounds obvious enough, but experience shows that it is a thing which it is not at all so easy to establish. Mere scholarship, at any rate, would not be sufficient to bring it about. What is demanded for it is, it seems, no less than that the philosopher exhibit

¹ *Appearance and Reality*, p. 6.

in his whole demeanour to the best of his ability what philosophy at its highest stands for. For if his partner was somehow to suspect that he had an axe to grind, that, in other words, he lived *from* philosophy rather than *for* philosophy, then he would not be very likely to open his heart to him. Nor would the philosopher be successful, if he were not capable of thinking and speaking of himself, as it were, in the third person, so as to convey the impression to his companion that it was not he who wanted to instruct him, but rather that he was submitting himself no less than him to a third and higher authority, before which, if need be, they would have both to bow alike.

This, then, is the first condition which must be fulfilled if a philosophical discussion is to be set going at all. At the same time, it will be incumbent upon the philosopher to strive to remove the obstacles which stand in the way of a ready acceptance of truth in the mind of his associate. And this again is no easy performance. For even supposing that a man is quite willing in general, as a philosopher for instance ought to be, to learn, and to improve himself whenever there is an opportunity for doing so, there still remains in him in each particular case a certain resistance against the reception of new truth,

because there is involved in every act of un-learning a certain pain, in so far as it is hurting our self-confidence and our pride to admit that we have hitherto harboured wrong ideas, and in so far as there is imposed on us by it the not always pleasant task of revising our conclusions, and of throwing our beliefs once more into the melting-pot. And, if this proves to be so in the case of the philosopher, who has trained himself systematically for the submission of his personal whims to the claims of truth, how much greater must be the resistance to truth in a man who has not enjoyed the privilege of such a protracted self-education?

In practice it seems to me that the philosopher will proceed in this matter as follows. He will not suffer himself to become discouraged when his interlocutor appears to avoid contact by evading every issue from which a debate might be started, but he will follow him closely in his arguments, be they never so distorted, until they reach a point where he cannot help taking things seriously. And such a point will sooner or later always be found; for, if there were none, then there could be no reasonable idea in that man at all, because there would be no premises on which to base any belief whatsoever. If, therefore, we have to deal with a person who is not directly

insane, we can affirm confidently that there is invariably in the recesses of his mind a doctrine from which we may begin a philosophical discussion, if only we have patience enough in hunting it down.¹

It is remarkable how widely this practical task of creating contact between the philosopher and a non-philosophical public has as a rule been neglected by the modern philosophers. The ancients thought of this quite differently. Among them it was recognized to be an integral part of the philosopher's accomplishment to be able to incite others to the study of philosophy by showing them that it was the very thing they needed. "Tell me one thing," Socrates asks the famous pair of sophists, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus,² "can you make a good man of

¹ This method of establishing contact with a recalcitrant partner is applied with consummate skill by Socrates in his conversation with Callicles, as we learn from the *Gorgias*. There, for a time, Socrates is even reduced to carrying on the argument in a monologue, and to being content that his opponent is at least polite enough not to refuse to listen to his words. But even so, Socrates does not yet throw up the sponge; and, in the end, he actually succeeds in dragging Callicles in again into the discussion.—I owe this insight largely to Prof. Larsson, who, in his very readable book on *Platon och vår tid*, writes (p. 69): "Något annat sätt att överbevisa ges väl icke i moraliska ting. Om en person icke har någon punkt, där han själv av outrotlig övertygelse gör en skillnad mellan rätt och orätt, så är ingen diskussion möjlig. Men en sådan punkt finns väl alltid? I många fall träffar man rätt snart på den." ² *Euthyd.* 274 D, E.

him only who is already convinced that he ought to learn of you, or of him also who is not convinced?"; and when the sophists feign as if they did not understand this question, he is made to produce offhand the most beautiful "exhortation to philosophy" that, as far as I know, exists in philosophical literature.¹ Of Aristotle, Epicurus, and Cicero we know that they equally excelled in writing similar treatises, and in the *Protrepticus* of the Neoplatonist Jamblichus we have still extant a specimen of that branch of writing, which, prolix and diffuse though it be in parts, may still give us an idea what it usually would be like. That the moderns did not concern themselves as a rule with this side of philosophy seems to me to indicate that they lost, to a lamentable extent, the belief in the practical value of philosophy for social and public life.

So far, then, I have tried to show how a philosophical discussion as a preliminary condition to any philosophical influence can be originated. But with this we have not touched yet upon the real work of the philosopher. I must therefore proceed further, and make the attempt to describe how, after contact having

¹ *Ib.* 278 E-282 D, and 288 D, *sqq.*

thus been established, the proper cure of ignorance is carried out.

As is to be expected from every cure, the procedure cannot be an unmixed blessing for the patient, at least while it lasts. Such it is with the healing of most bodily diseases; it is therefore to be concluded that it will hardly be otherwise with the healing of mental sicknesses either. In fact it seems that what must first be aimed at for a cure from ignorance is that a man be aroused out of his complacency with himself. And for achieving this end there must be administered to him a sort of mental shock. Such at least would appear to be the case from what we read in the *Meno*. In that dialogue Socrates is depicted to be teaching a slave boy by questioning him skilfully about the proportion between the sides of two squares, of which the latter includes an area as large again as the former. At first, as is natural, the boy rashly gives some wrong answers, but soon he is brought to the right attitude towards the matter and, what is far more, he incidentally becomes aware of his previous mistakes and of his proneness to error in general. Meno, the owner of the boy, is standing by and is visibly pleased at seeing how effectively the Socratic method works. But when he not long after-

wards gets himself into an entanglement of bad arguments, and is in his turn convicted of ignorance by Socrates, he becomes angry at once, and complains that this sort of cross-examination has an influence on the person subjected to it like that of the "flat torpedo fish, who torpifies those who come near him and touch him".¹ Yet, Socrates is not perturbed. He knows that his cure, though painful at the beginning, is beneficial in the end. He therefore replies: "If we have made him (*sc.* the slave boy) doubt, and given him the 'torpedo's shock', have we done him any harm?"—"I think not."—"We have certainly, as would seem, assisted him in some degree to the discovery of the truth; and now he will wish to remedy his ignorance, but then he would have been ready to tell all the world again and again that the double space should have a double side."—"True."—"But do you suppose that he would ever have enquired into or learned what he fancied that he knew, though he was really ignorant of it, until he had fallen into perplexity under the idea that he did not know, and had desired to know?"—"I think not, Socrates."—"Then he was better for the torpedo's touch?"—"I think so."²

¹ 80 A.² *Ib.* 84 B C.

Such, I believe, is the cure of simple ignorance. Evidently, it is not quite an agreeable experience. But much more difficult than these rectifications of opinions regarding mere matter of fact are the cases where the erroneous ideas that must be driven out are not only due to a gap in our information, but seem to be adhered to from a wrong moral habit. Here a simple torpedo's shock no longer appears to be a sufficient remedy; what is called for must be compared rather to a surgical operation. Plato gives the following description of the procedure to which the philosophers have to resort in an instance like this: "They cross-examine a man's words, when he thinks that he is saying something and is really saying nothing, and easily convict him of inconsistencies in his opinions; these they then collect by the dialectical process, and placing them side by side, show that they contradict one another about the same things, in relation to the same things, and in the same respect. He, seeing this, is angry with himself, and grows gentle towards others, and thus is entirely delivered from great prejudices and harsh notions, in a way which is most amusing to the hearer, and produces the most lasting good effect on the person who is the subject of the operation. For as the physician considers

that the body will receive no benefit from taking food until the internal obstacles have been removed, so the purifier of the soul is conscious that his patient will receive no benefit from the application of knowledge until he is refuted, and from refutation learns modesty; he must be purged of his prejudices first and made to think that he knows only what he knows, and no more."¹

In this manner, then, according to Plato, has philosophical teaching to begin to do its work. But with this result we must not suppose that our inquiry has already reached its goal. For so far we have only come to see how the foundation for a genuine philosophical education can be laid; we have not yet asked by what kind of knowledge the philosopher was enabled to achieve this first result, and, what is no less important, by what kind of knowledge the mind of a man thus newly liberated from ignorance can be fortified so as to guide itself henceforth and be no longer in danger of falling back into its previous deplorable condition. And as long as this has not been shown, our account of

¹ *Soph.* 230 B-E. Cf. *Theaet.* 210 C: ἡττον ἔση βαρὺς τοῖς συννοῦσι καὶ ἡμερώτερος σωφρόνως οὐκ οἰόμενος εἰδέναι ἃ μὴ οἶσθα.

Plato's conception of philosophy would still be incomplete. It is therefore to the question as to the nature of philosophical knowledge that we shall now turn our attention.

From what has been said in the foregoing chapter, it is to be expected that Plato will postulate that knowledge, as required in philosophy, be a sort of general experience, guided and supervised by reason, and accompanied by constant self-criticism. And such is it in fact. For, first, it must indeed be evident that the philosophical cross-examiner is obliged to have at his command a great store of miscellaneous knowledge, both theoretical and practical; for in order that he may bring out the hidden contradictions of his interlocutor's false opinions, he must himself be master of the facts, and, if possible, be able even to carry out the manipulations, concerning which those erroneous opinions were formed. Nor must his psychological interest be fixed on mere generalities, because it is a well-known fact that every cure demands a procedure of its own. Or again, it might be said that, if the philosopher is called upon to pull down castles in Spain without at the same time killing their inhabitants, he must know fairly well the material of which these castles are built, since otherwise his enterprise would be too

dangerous. And much the same could be put forward with regard to the mind of the man who has only of late escaped from ignorance, whether it be in its simple or in its more aggravated form. Or is there any better antidote than practical experience against the dangers of making empty generalizations and of building up abstract theories, by which we fancy that we are capable of mastering the universe by prescribing to it, as it were, how it ought to behave, and from which all our graver delusions seem to take their origin?

And yet, however valuable this experience may be, it is no secret that salvation cannot be found either in mere matter of fact alone. For if not interpreted in the light of reason, that information which we gather from our perceptions and impressions would turn out to be chaotic, and would threaten the unity of our personality. It is therefore necessary that our experience be submitted to the guidance of reason, or to a process in which it is sifted and arranged in order. Plato was fully aware of this need. He saw quite well that the cross-examiner must not only be versed in innumerable details, but must also be able to grasp certain fundamental laws in psychology, by which he can determine that "such and such persons are

affected by this or that kind of speech in this or that way".¹ Nor was he blind to the danger of a situation when "the world is too much with us", when, in other words, we are engrossed and almost eaten up by facts; and so he strongly urged that, however essential it may be never to lose touch with reality, we should always strive at the same time to keep the facts at a certain distance from us, or, what amounts to the same thing, to maintain an attitude of comparative detachment. And for doing this, he believed that there could be no greater help than that provided by the study of mathematics. For through the method pursued in mathematics Plato was convinced we may learn to see things in a kind of logical transparency, as if their weight and opacity was in a way taken off from them, and may accustom ourselves to a high standard of lucidity for our own thinking, and for the mode of exposition through which we make our thoughts known to others; and this standard, when once set up and acknowledged, he thought, could not fail to make us critical with regard to all experimental probability, and to save us from the error of proclaiming that to be a final truth which, after all, is no more than a hypothesis based on the slender foundation of

¹ *Phaedrus* 271 D.

fallible evidence as given us by the dim light of experience.

And that leads us directly to our third point, namely to the demand that our progress in learning must always be accompanied by critical self-examination. I will not here repeat what I have said already on this matter in the previous chapter, where exception was taken to Kant's transformation of the critical principle from a constant practical attitude into a mere singular doctrinal question however important. It seems to me that, from all that has been advanced since, it must have become evident beyond all doubt that a criticism like that of Kant, in which the critical part can be, so to speak, forestalled and disposed of once for all, so as to allow one to indulge again in unlimited speculations later (as it might be said to have been borne out by the fact that Kant's critical philosophy was followed by the metaphysical dreams of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, and by a period in the history of thought, when systems were made to grow almost, as it were, in greenhouses), would never be capable of fulfilling the task imposed on the philosopher by his profession, as understood by Plato.

Practical experience, logical control, and unintermittent self-criticism, these three, then, are

the factors that may be contended to make up philosophical knowledge according to Plato. It is frankly to be admitted that it is not easy to combine their several activities in one and the same philosophical effort, since apparently they tend in quite different directions; but here, as elsewhere, it would be "unsafe to assume", as Professor Taylor says,¹ "that . . . the option which makes things easiest must be the wisest". Indeed it is therefore to be postulated that these three functions operate in close alliance, and that none of them be over-emphasized at the expense of, or unduly neglected to the alleged benefit of the others.

It would seem that this ideal can only be safeguarded when we keep on learning throughout our lives, and that, consequently, only he can be regarded as a true philosopher who is never tired of acquiring new knowledge, who always thinks very lightly of what he knows already, reckoning that, strictly speaking, he does not know for absolutely certain anything at all, and who is ready to admire all people in whom he can find accomplishments of which he feels that he cannot boast himself. Of such a character, undoubtedly, was Socrates. It is an almost pathetic picture: that elderly gentleman,

¹ *The Faith of a Moralist*, ii. 42.

of not much less than seventy years, going, probably barefooted, to the shops of the artisans in order to learn from them! And yet that is what he tells us that he actually did. For, after having tried the poets and the politicians, and having found them wanting in solid knowledge, "at last", he says,¹ "I went to the artisans, for I was conscious that I knew nothing at all, as I may say, and I was sure that they knew many fine things; and here I was not mistaken, for they did know many things of which I was ignorant, and in this they certainly were wiser than I was". But they, too, were discovered to be lacking in one thing: self-criticism. And by this one failure, he judged, their skill in a particular craft could not but turn out to be, in the end, again the source of innumerable errors, because they presumed that, being master of one trade, they were competent in other fields also, where in fact they had no knowledge whatever. "I observed", he continues his narrative,² "that even the good artisans fell into the same error as the poets;—because they were good workmen they thought that they also knew all sorts of high matters, and this defect in them overshadowed their wisdom; and therefore I asked myself on behalf of the oracle (*sc.* the Pythian sentence

¹ *Apol.* 22 C, D.² *Ib.* 22 E.

by which he was declared to be the wisest man alive), whether I would like to be as I was, neither having their knowledge nor their ignorance, or like them in both; and I made answer to myself and to the oracle that I was better off as I was." This passage of the *Apology* has always been dear to me for showing, first, that the acquiring of empirical knowledge and critical self-examination must never be severed from each other, and, secondly, that although in particular matters the philosopher must everywhere be conscious that he is at a disadvantage when compared with the specialist, he nevertheless ought not to fall into the opposite error of underrating his own value, since, taken in general, his state of mind is still far better than that of anybody else, and, indeed, the best to which a human being is capable of attaining at all.¹

Thus it might be thought, perhaps, that our description of Plato's ideal of philosophical knowledge had now become adequate and com-

¹ Plato, it is true, could not be imagined going in persona like his master to the artisans. But when in the *Politicus* he describes the weaver's work with a thoroughness that calls forth a sigh from even the most patient of his readers, he does the same at least in spirit. There is no difference in the intention between the two great Athenian thinkers.

plete. And yet, this would be a rash assumption. For so far we have still left untouched what I think to be its most important feature: I mean its close and essential relation to the "Idea of Good", as to that ultimate principle from which alone, in the end, things, as well as our knowledge about them, can derive the comparative value they have. On this point, Plato's teaching is quite unambiguous. Information of what merely "is" would have appeared to him to be a matter not worth striving for. He was convinced that things, in order to become of real interest to us, must be referred to a standard of being and value, on which, in the words of St. Anselm, "they depend not only for that they exist, but also for that they exist well".¹ The trite distinction between their "esse" and their "bene esse", and the assumption that the one can be contemplated without the other, would therefore never have been acceptable to him, because, as he saw well enough, no man can actually be genuinely interested in the mere existence of a thing apart from any consideration as to its value.

This doctrine of the inseparability of value from existence has been conveyed to us by

¹ "Quo omnia indigent, ut sint, et ut bene sint" (*Prosl.* cap. 22).

Plato in the following argument. Suppose, he says, that there is solid practical knowledge like that of the artisans, which at the same time is not spoilt by being uncritically applied beyond the range of its validity, and add to this in imagination that all this knowledge is accumulated in the mind of one and the same man, so that he can freely dispose of it whenever he likes; in short, suppose that there is "some one who knows the past and present as well as the future, and is ignorant of nothing";¹ would such a man's knowledge be of any use to him? Obviously not. For he would still be ignorant as to the ultimate end for which he might avail himself of his knowledge. Moreover, such knowledge would teach him only what things are; he could not gather from it how to use them. And yet on this question as to the right or wrong use of things depends, as we have pointed out in an earlier chapter,² their value for us. "The great thing", as Plutarch rightly says, "is not to possess things, but to know how to use them."³ Nor is it from their mere possession but from their right or wrong application, according to another Platonist, Maximus Con-

¹ *Charm.* 174 A.

² See above, p. 75.

³ *De Alex. s. Virt.* Or. ii. 5: "Ὅθεν οὐκ ἐν τῇ κτήσει τῶν ἀγαθῶν, ἀλλὰ ἐν τῇ χρήσει τὸ μέγα ἐστίν."

fessor, that we become either virtuous or depraved.¹ And if this be true, we must no longer be astonished when Plato affirms as the general conclusion of these reflexions "that the life according to knowledge is not that which makes men act rightly and be happy, not even if knowledge include all the sciences, but one science only, that of good and evil".²

It is true that from the specialist or craftsman *qua* craftsman such a consideration as to the ultimate end towards which his work is directed cannot reasonably be demanded. It would be incongruous, indeed, to ask, for instance, from a physician *qua* physician that he know "whether health or disease is the more terrible to a man", or whether "not many a man had better never get up from a sick-bed"?³ As a physician, he has the simple duty of endeavouring, to the best of his abilities, to heal all his patients irrespective of the question whether or not, morally speaking, they deserve being healed, or whether or no they are likely to make a right use of their restored health in the future. We must be content, therefore, if a craftsman does not presume that through his

¹ *Cap. de Car.* 2. 75: Τὸ οὖν εἶ τοῦτοις χρήσασθαι ἢ κακῶς, ἢ τοῖς περὶ ταῦτα συμβεβηκόσιν, ἢ ἐναρέτους ἢ φαύλους ἡμᾶς ἀποφαίνει.

² *Charm.* 174 B, C.

³ *Laches* 195 C.

work he can establish the ultimate value of things or actions; we must not expect from him more than he can perform. In other words, it must be enough for us if the craftsman think of himself in the same way as that simple-hearted lifeboatman, of whom Plato speaks in the *Gorgias*. That man, he says, is modest and unpresuming; for "he is able to reflect . . . that he cannot tell which of his fellow-passengers he has benefited, and which of them he has injured in not allowing them to be drowned. He knows that they are just the same when he has disembarked them as when they embarked, and not a whit better either in their bodies or in their souls; and he considers that if a man who is afflicted by great and incurable bodily diseases is only to be pitied for having escaped, and is in no way benefited by him in having been saved from drowning, much less he who has great and incurable diseases, not of the body, but of the soul, which is the more valuable part of him", because he "reflects that such a one had better not live", since he "cannot live well".¹

But if the specialist in each branch of knowledge or skill is thus exempted from giving an account of the ultimate source from which all other things and actions derive their compara-

¹ 511 E-512 B, with some omissions.

tive value, the philosopher certainly is not. On the contrary, he might be said to be concerned with scarcely anything else. For him is the consideration of the value of things a most essential part of the profession. And, if this is really so, then there follows, as a necessary deduction, a proposition of the utmost significance. For it will now appear that the highest end of philosophy is no more to be sought in mere knowledge, but rather in wisdom, that is, in the great art of seeing things in their due proportion, and according to their true values, and of acting in harmony with this understanding. And philosophy itself must no longer be considered to be primarily an intellectual pursuit, but rather becomes, as it has already been hinted at, a walk of life, based, as it seems, on the momentous decision to try at all times and in all circumstances to find out what is the best state for things to be in, and then to live so as to help to bring about that state.

That this was, in fact, Plato's view of philosophy seems to me beyond any doubt. He never wanted to supply men only with knowledge,—this may be said with him to be a by-product,—but he always strove to make them truer and better, or rather, as he would probably have preferred to express himself, to help them in

finding their own truer and better selves. Nor did he conceive of knowledge as of a mere registration of facts. 'Επίστασθαι, the technical term for "to know", in his writings means always some practical knowledge, and ought, if I am not mistaken, to be translated by an expression like the French *savoir faire*. In one passage Plato even went as far as to suggest that knowledge, as required in philosophy, was, strictly speaking, of such a nature that it would include both the skill to make a thing, and the proper handling of it after it has been made.¹ And if so, then it is evident that the scope of philosophy, according to him, lay beyond mere knowledge, in something which, for convenience's sake, we may well call by the name of "wisdom".

With that, I believe, we have taken an important step forward in our understanding of Plato's conception of philosophy. But it would be still premature to suppose that so we have come already within sight of our goal. For now it will again appear that this ideal of wisdom, although the highest aim in philosophy, can

¹ *Euthyd.* 289 B: Τοιαύτης τινὸς ἄρα ἡμῖν ἐπιστήμης δεῖ . . . ἐν ᾗ συμπέπτωκεν ἅμα τό τε ποιεῖν καὶ τὸ ἐπίστασθαι χρῆσθαι τούτῳ ὃ ἂν ποιῇ.

never be reached by any philosopher in practice. And this for two reasons. The first is that the "idea of the good", as was pointed out on an earlier occasion, does not enter as the supreme link in the chain of our human ends and means, but remains strictly transcendent, and so can never be made an adequate object of our thought or imagination. And the second is that, since this world is in a constant flux, we cannot reasonably hope to appraise the value of things and action once and for all, according to a fixed pattern, but must try to do so over and over again, and to keep their balance and equilibrium through unceasing readjustment.

Nor is that all. For it will further appear that the attaining to this ideal, if it were possible, would not even be desirable. For suppose a man had perfect knowledge of the "good", so that he was in a position to judge about the value of all things with unfailing certainty, and suppose that this knowledge, as it would needs be if it were perfect, was so strong in him that he could never, not even in the greatest temptations, lose sight of it, and consequently act contrary to its demands; what would result from it? The result would be, I think, that the man who possessed that knowledge would be turned at once into what may be called a moral robot. And as such

he would cease to be an ethical being. For automatic morality is a contradiction in terms. To make moral life possible, it would therefore seem that human knowledge must not be perfect, since otherwise a man could not act at his own risk and on his own responsibility, nor do anything at all that could be imputed to him as to a reasonable personality. Consequently no philosopher ought ever to claim to be called a "wise man" as did the post-Aristotelian thinkers, since at his best he can only be, as is implied in his very name, a lover of wisdom. For a man who was really wise could clearly no longer be a representative of our species; he would become at once either a god or a super-man, that is, a being with whom we could have no intelligible intercourse, since it would so happen that neither would he be able to feel any longer as we do, being lifted up high above our troubles and defects, nor we capable of understanding his message to us, because the light of his wisdom would dazzle us to such an extent as to become indistinguishable from its very opposite, from darkness.

This, I believe, ought to be quite evident. And yet, unfortunately, experience teaches us that there are comparatively few people who take these arguments seriously, so as to live

according to them, and to renounce resolutely their metaphysical speculations; and that even among those who call themselves philosophers there are not many who are strong enough to pin their faith on something that they cannot any longer expect to become capable of controlling with their intellects. It seems that it is not given to the majority of them to rely exclusively on their moral conscience, and to submit themselves unconditionally to its guidance; they want to see as well, not only to believe, and by the help of their understanding to manage in their own name the affairs of their lives. This desire, of course, is understandable enough, and it would betray a lamentable lack of charity, were we to judge harshly any particular man on this score; but, on the other hand, it would be no less fatal either, were we, as philosophers, blind to the fact that this disordered desire for knowledge is the main obstacle to genuine philosophy, and, I may add, to any sound religious faith too, and were we to condone it by a certain kind of compromise or accommodation. For, after all, it is, as the writer of the third chapter of the book of Genesis knew full well, a serious defect indeed, the more so, since it inevitably leads, if not checked in time, to such vices as

dogmatism, intolerance, and persecution.

It is therefore not surprising when we learn that in Plato's writings there are no less than five well-considered arguments against these claims to final knowledge. And, I think, it cannot be astonishing, from what has just been said, when I cannot prevail upon myself to abstain from setting them forth at some length in this study. It may be, it is true, that some of my readers will get the impression that they are already quite familiar with what I am now going to put forward, and that all in it is more or less commonplace. But if so, would it be too much to ask them to be patient a little with their less fortunate brethren who are still labouring under the temptation to forget, under the pressure of their ardent desire for ultimate knowledge, what they would otherwise doubtless know equally well too? For, in general,

Tal, credo, è l'uomo, o tale almen son io.¹

The first of Plato's arguments against the possibility of final knowledge, then, I would say, is to the effect that all our knowledge that has a practical concern for us is strictly empirical, and that there is nothing in philosophy

¹ "Such, I believe, is man, or such at least am I" (Alfieri. *Sulla vita sua*).

like a short-cut to permanent conclusions by a so-called "*a priori* road". This does not imply, to be sure, that knowledge is not founded on logical rules, and that there is no such thing as pure thought in logic or mathematics; it only means that, whenever we have to deal with practical reality, these merely logical rules, as we have already pointed out several times, would be just as "empty", if not applied to facts, as these facts would be "blind", if not marshalled by logical rules. Form and matter, in other words, Plato holds, can, in practice, never be separated. This, in his view, is at least the judgement of a mature man. "As time goes on", he says in the *Sophist*,¹ and the "hearers advance in years, and come into closer contact with realities, and have learnt by sad experience to see and feel the truth of things, are not the greater part of them compelled to change many opinions which they formerly entertained, so that the great appears small to them, and the easy difficult, and all their dreamy speculations are overturned by the facts of life?" This, it seems to me, ought to be clear enough. It can, however, be demonstrated also by the indirect method. For suppose that there is actually in philosophy a

¹ 234 D, E.

short-cut to final truth, what would be the result? It would be, as Plato shows in the *Gorgias*, that the philosopher, like the rhetorician, "need not know the truth about things; he had only to discover some way of persuading the ignorant that he has more knowledge than those who know".¹ "Yes," answers Gorgias, and would this not be "a great comfort?—not to have learned the other arts, but the art of rhetoric only, and yet to be in no way inferior to the professors of them?"² No commentary, I think, is needed. Wisdom is justified of her children.

The second argument is based on the consideration that, when once we have had an occasion to doubt our capacities for knowledge, we can nevermore be sure whether a similar experience may not again await us at any moment in the future. As Descartes says, "it is wiser not to trust entirely to any thing by which we have once been deceived".³ Plato does not give us the argument in this abstract setting, but in a vivid picture of what happened, when the proofs for the immortality of the soul given by Socrates were shattered, as it seemed, by the objections of Simmias and Cebes. "All of us", he relates in the *Phaedo*,⁴ "as we afterwards

¹ 459 B, C. ² *Ib.* 459 C. ³ *Meditations* i. ⁴ 88 C.

remarked to one another, had an unpleasant feeling at hearing what they said. When we had been so firmly convinced before, now to have our faith shaken seemed to introduce a confusion and uncertainty, not only into the previous argument, but into any future one; either we were incapable of forming a judgment, or there were no grounds of belief." From what follows as a consequence that, supposing I should later on again arrive at a solution to my doubts, a solution which seems to me entirely conclusive and so convincing that I could not imagine how anybody should ever again be able to raise an objection against it, even then I ought to keep a kind of reserve in my thoughts, and to say with Simmias: "I have nothing more to say: nor can I see any reason for doubt after what has been said. But I still feel and cannot help feeling uncertain in my own mind, when I think of the greatness of the subject and the feebleness of man."¹

The third argument proceeds from the obvious fact that philosophy does not move, so to speak, between absolute ignorance and absolute knowledge as its lower and its higher limits, but rather between comparative ignorance and comparative knowledge, or, to put it in simpler

¹ *Ib.* 107 A, B.

terms, between doubt and belief in reasoned truth. We have seen earlier in this chapter¹ that the gods and wise men, if there are any, would not be interested in philosophy, because they would have no need of it; nor the absolutely ignorant, because they would not even be aware of their ignorance. It seems therefore that at least a certain amount of knowledge, adumbrations, as it were, of truth, must be in our minds, if we are to engage in philosophical inquiries at all. Hence it is to Meno's three questions: "How will you enquire, Socrates, into that which you do not know?, What will you put forth as the subject of enquiry?, And if you find what you want, how will you ever know that this is the thing which you did not know?",² that Socrates replies with the rejoinder that the argument put thus could not be regarded as sound, since it would commit us straightway to the assumption that man is either totally ignorant or totally knowing, overlooking the third possibility that he might well be ignorant only in part, or *secundum quid*, as the Schoolmen say, and that degrees of clearness and certitude, although not in pure logic, might well have their due place in man as a whole. Hence also, I believe, is derived the reason why Socrates, in the same dialogue,

¹ See above, p. 145 sq.

² *Meno* 80 D.

declares that "there is no teaching" in philosophy, but only "recollection",¹ thus suggesting that our progress in philosophical knowledge consists merely in our being reminded of things that somehow or other must already, to a certain extent, have been present in our minds, but were hitherto not apprehended distinctly, nor taken out of the indiscriminate mass of our feelings and emotions, in order to become a detached image and an object of our thought.²

The fourth argument may be said to be closely akin to the third. It is to the effect that absolute knowledge in philosophy would be a contradiction in terms. This is shown thus. If we admit, as it seems we must, that philosophy owes its

¹ *Ib.* 82 A.

² These arguments have been reproduced as a weapon against the dogmatic assumptions of the Aristotelians, the Stoics, and the Epicureans by Sextus Empiricus (see *Hyp.* iii. 259-265 and *Adv. Math.* xi. (*Adv. Dogm.* v.) 234-238). How timely that rejoinder was may be seen from Plutarch, who writes (*Fragm.* vii. 6; Dübner): Οἱ μὲν γὰρ Περιπατητικοὶ τὸν δυνάμει νοῦν ἐπενόησαν· ἡμεῖς δὲ ἡπορούμεν ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐνεργείᾳ εἰδέναι καὶ μὴ εἰδέναι. ἔστω γὰρ εἶναι τὸν δυνάμει νοῦν, ἀλλ' ἔτι ἀπορία ἢ αὐτή. Πῶς γὰρ οὗτος νοεῖ; ἢ γὰρ ἂ οἶδεν ἢ ἂ οὐκ οἶδεν; Οἱ δ' ἀπὸ τῆς Στοᾶς τὰς φυσικὰς ἐννοίας αἰτιῶνται· εἰ μὲν δὴ δυνάμει, ταῦτ' ἐρούμεν· εἰ δ' ἐνεργείᾳ, διὰ τί ζητοῦμεν ἂ ἴσμεν; εἰ δ' ἀπὸ τούτων ἄλλα ἀγνοούμενα, πῶς ἄπερ οὐκ ἴσμεν; Οἱ δ' Ἐπικούρειοι τὰς προλήψεις· ἃς εἰ μὲν διηρθρωμένας φασί, περιττὴ ἢ ζήτησις· εἰ δ' ἀδιαρθρώτους, πῶς ἄλλο τι παρὰ τὰς προλήψεις ἐπιζητοῦμεν ὃ γε οὐδὲ προειλήφαμεν;

first impulse to comparative ignorance, as a remedy against which it is resorted to, then it follows that the result of our philosophical inquiries, if successfully carried out, must be the solution of our former uncertainty, and contain, simultaneously, an account of the reasons why we have fallen into it. But this, in its turn, would lead to the embarrassing conclusion, if we were to suppose that the end of philosophy is indeed absolute knowledge, that, by this knowledge, from which, being perfect, nothing could be concealed, the philosopher does not only know the solution of his former uncertainty, but even that uncertainty *qua* uncertainty, or, what is the same, his comparative ignorance *qua* ignorance. In other words he would not only know that which he knows, but also "that which he does not know . . . ; than which", as Plato says, "nothing can be more irrational".¹ This reasoning may appear to some, perhaps, a little artificial and far-fetched; yet I do not see how its conclusion can be avoided, if we should assume that absolute knowledge was in fact obtainable for the philosopher.

In the fifth argument, lastly, Plato reminds us that absolute or final knowledge is possible only on condition that we are able to know adequately

¹ *Charm*, 175 c.

ourselves; for only then could we be said to know that we know. But now it appears that the issue whether our self-consciousness can become evident to us is very far from being agreed upon. At a closer examination it would rather seem impossible to know oneself. For in order to do so, the knowing subject ought not only to know that part of the self which can be made a detachable object of thought, but also that which *ex hypothesi* can never become an object. As Plato expresses himself, for knowing one's own self there would be required "a science of this kind, which, having no subject-matter, is a science of itself and of the other sciences".¹ Yet, Socrates is made to say,² "I altogether distrust my own power of determining these matters: I am not certain whether there is such a science of science at all."

I confess that I often marvelled at seeing how light-heartedly the modern philosophers in general treated this difficult question. Descartes, for instance, although he must have been aware that his methodical doubt only proved that doubt *qua* doubt cannot destroy man's consciousness of himself as of a thinking being, but could not give him any further information of his essence nor guarantee his continued existence beyond

¹ *Ib.* 168 A.

² *Ib.* 169 A, B.

the very moment of his doubts, nevertheless defined the human self as a "thinking substance". In Spinoza we meet with the fallacy that, "since, in order that I may know that I know, I must needs have a previous knowledge, it follows that certitude is nothing else but objective reality".¹ Such are the drawbacks, I am afraid, of his boast that "with him the authority of Plato, Aristotle, or Socrates did not count for much".² Bishop Berkeley, it is true, distinguished between a "notion", or the apprehension of the self of itself, and an "idea", that is, the perception of something outside my knowing self;³ but as he did not show how such a notion is possible, it cannot be said that he vindicated the validity of human knowledge. Kant tried to "prove" the existence of the so-called "transcendental unity of apprehension" (which, by the way, is not identical according to him with the human self, but which it is difficult to imagine what it could mean else) by showing that it is an indispensable condition for human

¹ "Ut sciam me scire, necessario debeo prius scire. Hinc patet quod certitudo nihil sit praeter ipsam essentiam objectivam" (*De Intellectus Emendatione*, p. 12; Van Vloten et Land).

² "Non multum apud me auctoritas Platonis, Aristotelis, ac Socratis valet" (*Ep.* lvi., to Boxel).

³ *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, i. § 27 (second edition).

knowledge. But since we are not able to accept his premise that knowledge is the indisputable goal of all philosophy, we cannot accept his conclusion either. Still less satisfactory are the theories of Fichte or Hegel, who endeavoured to establish self-knowledge by declaring that it was either an "original act of the self" or a particular instance of a universal feature in the Absolute or the Spirit, whose essence is maintained to be its own development in time. These doctrines seem to me to be pure assertions, and not substantiated by any cogent arguments whatever. I must therefore concur with Professor Webb, who criticizes this haughtiness of the modern philosophers in these words:¹ "The ancients had been content to start with an objective reality, in the apprehension whereof knowledge consisted, a reality normally other than the mind that knows it; a point of view from which self-knowledge is bound to appear as something paradoxical, raising the question what the self is, which must, because it is known, be other than the self that knows it, although it is also recognized to be the same with it".

Thus, I think, we may take leave of Plato's

¹ *Religion and the Thought of To-day*, p. 28.

quinque viae, or five ways, to prove that peremptory knowledge is not to be expected from philosophy. But there remains still another question which needs to be discussed at this point, namely the question whether, if it has been shown that absolute knowledge is not obtainable, it is not our duty to strive at least to approach it as far as possible. It is well known that this was the opinion of Kant. But unlike Kant, Plato answers this question in the negative. And as far as I can see, rightly so. For it would be wrong, as stated already in another place,¹ to imagine that, in the realm of the finite, an advancement, however great, could bring us nearer to the infinite, or that by an increase of our knowledge, we could diminish the stock of what we do not know. Rather, since every newly discovered principle necessitates us to inquire once more into its relation with what we know already, would it be true to say that the range of our ignorance grows in proportion to the range of our knowledge. Moreover, as St. Thomas Aquinas says,² "the more a man knows, the greater is his desire to know still more". And finally, "from many contingent

¹ See above, p. 127.

² *Summa contra Gentiles*, iii. 25: quanto enim aliquis plura scit, tanto maiori desiderio affectat scire.

premises there does not follow a necessary conclusion".¹

In addition to this, Plato was fully convinced that "absolute knowledge" is not needed in our human lives at all. For if we concede that philosophy is essentially the practical task of combating error, and if we concede further that all the practical duties which we have to perform in this life are of a finite character, then there should be no insurmountable obstacle to our being content, in principle, with finite knowledge as well, since it shows itself sufficient for coping with every emergent situation. That does not imply, of course, that we should not always strive after the greatest amount of knowledge within our reach, and after the minutest precision regarding all its details; nor does it mean that it is easy for us men to renounce once and for all that fancy of final philosophical truth; but it means that this renouncement is at least possible and, what is more than that, reasonable. Accordingly we read in the *Phaedo* that it is not in this life that we shall "attain the wisdom which we desire, and of which we say that we are lovers; not while we live, but after death; for if while in company with the body (*i.e.* as long as

¹ *Ib.* iii. 86: Ex multis contingentibus non potest fieri unum necessarium.

our thoughts must be applied to the empirical facts conveyed to our minds through our sense-perception, in order to become real objects), the soul cannot have pure knowledge, one of two things follows—either knowledge is not to be attained at all, or, if at all, after death. For then, and not till then, the soul will be parted from the body and exist in herself alone. In this present life, I reckon that we make the nearest approach to knowledge (*sc.* as far as it is practically required) when we have the least possible intercourse or communion with the body (that is, when we detach ourselves from the world as much as possible), and are not surfeited with the bodily nature, but keep ourselves pure until the hour when God himself is pleased to release us.”¹

The goal of human life, in other words, must not be sought in mere knowledge, but in something higher, to which knowledge can be subservient only as a means. “If to acquire knowledge”, writes Bishop Butler,² “were our proper end, we should indeed be but poorly provided: but if somewhat else be our business and duty, we may, notwithstanding our ignor-

¹ 66 E-67 A. I must apologize for the three inserted comments, but without them, I fear, this passage might be open to misunderstandings.

² *Fifteen Sermons*, xv. § 9 (Gladstone's edition).

ance, be well enough furnished for it; and the observation of our ignorance may be of assistance to us in the discharge of it". "The evidence of religion not appearing obvious, may constitute one particular part of some men's trial in the religious sense. . . . There seems no possible reason to be given, why we may not be in a state of moral probation, with regard to the exercise of our understanding upon the subject of religion, as we are with regard to our behaviour in common affairs."¹ Moreover, knowledge acquired for its own sake would hardly have any other effect on us than to make us self-satisfied and overbearing. As Cowper truly remarks,²

Knowledge is proud that he has learned so much;
Wisdom is humble that he knows no more.

Hence it appears that a mere pursuit of knowledge, though useful perhaps in the beginning to our intellects, could not in the long run but do harm to our personality as a whole, and so, however paradoxical it may sound, in the end impair even our specifically thinking faculties also.

But if in this manner wisdom can never become, as it were, the property of any living

¹ *The Analogy of Religion*, ii. chap. 6, § 10 (Gladstone).

² In the "Task".

man, we have nevertheless to hold it as an ideal constantly before our eyes, if our lives are to be saved from falling into confusion, and our minds from becoming a prey to ignorance and delusion. In other words, it is only in pursuing a transcendent idea that we can hope to escape misery in this life. Nor must it be forgotten that it is not only with regard to our theoretical opinions as to the nature of the universe that this danger of deceiving ourselves exists; for it applies to our moral maxims as well. "Can you wonder that persons who are inexperienced in the truth, as they have wrong ideas about many other things, should also have wrong ideas about pleasure and pain?", asks Socrates in the *Republic*.¹ Whereas, on the other hand, "when the whole soul follows the philosophical principle, and there is no division, the several parts are just, and do each of them their own business, and enjoy severally the best and truest pleasures of which they are capable".² But Plato does not even stop here. He goes so far as to affirm that, without wisdom, there is, strictly speaking, no virtue whatever, and that some sort of philosophy is absolutely indispensable for the good life. "All but the philosophers", he says,³ "are courageous only from fear, and because they

¹ 584 E.² *Ib.* 586 E-587 A.³ *Phaedo* 68 D.

are afraid; and yet", so the dialogue goes on,¹ "that a man should be courageous from fear, and because he is a coward, is surely a strange thing."—"Very true."—"And are not the temperate in exactly the same case? They are temperate because they are intemperate—which might seem to be a contradiction, but is nevertheless the sort of thing which happens with this foolish temperance. For there are pleasures which they are afraid of losing; and in their desire to keep them, they abstain from some pleasures, because they are overcome by others; and although to be conquered by pleasure is called by men intemperance, to them the conquest of pleasure consists in being conquered by pleasure. And that is what I mean by saying that, in a sense, they are made temperate through intemperance."—"Such appears to be the case."—"Yet the exchange of one fear or pleasure or pain for another fear or pleasure or pain, and of the greater for the less, as if they were coins, is not the exchange of virtue. O, my blessed Simmias, is there not one true coin for which all things ought to be exchanged?—and that is wisdom; and only in exchange for this, and in company with this, is anything truly bought or sold, whether courage or temperance or justice."

¹ *Ib.* 68 D-69 B.

Plato's argument in this passage is clearly based on the assumption that, without insight into the value of things, we should deal only with their shadows, and not with them as they really are. Consequently, he regarded acquisition of wisdom as our most important concern in life. "That we shall be better and braver and less helpless if we think that we ought to enquire, than we should have been if we indulged in the idle fancy that there was no knowing and no use in seeking to know what we do not know;—that is a theme upon which I am ready to fight, in word and deed, to the utmost of my power", says he in the comparatively early dialogue called *Meno*.¹ Nor is he less emphatic on this point in later years, as we may learn from the *Sophist*, where he writes:² "And surely contend we must in every possible way against him who would annihilate knowledge and reason and mind, and yet ventures to speak confidently about anything." There is no doubt but that the difficulties encountered in the investigation of philosophical matters are formidable. "Yet I should deem him a coward who did not prove what is said about them to the uttermost, or whose heart failed him before he had examined them on every side. For he should persevere until he has achieved

¹ 86 B, C.² 249 C.

one of two things: either he should discover, or be taught, the truth about them; or, if this be impossible, I would have him take the best and most irrefragable of human theories, and let this be the raft upon which he sails through life—not without risk, as I admit, if he cannot find some word of God which will more surely and safely carry him.”¹ There seems therefore to be only one thing that we must really fear, and be on our guard against, and that is the temptation of getting disheartened in face of seemingly overwhelming obstacles. Let us beware, we are admonished, “lest we become misologists. . . . No worse thing can happen to a man than this. For as there are misanthropists or haters of men, there are also misologists or haters of ideas, and both spring from the same cause, which is ignorance of the world. Misanthropy arises out of the too great confidence of inexperience;—you trust a man and think him altogether true and sound and faithful, and then in a little while he turns out to be false and knavish; and then another and another, and when this has happened several times to a man, especially when it

¹ *Phaedo* 85 C, D. It is true that these words are spoken by Simmias, but they are fully approved by Socrates, and therefore, I think, by Plato as well. They are noteworthy, too, for showing how open Plato's mind was to the possibility of a divine revelation, as is claimed to have taken place later by the Christians.

happens among those whom he deems to be his own most trusted and familiar friends, and he has often quarrelled with them, he at last hates all men, and believes that no one has any good in him at all. . . ."¹ Yet . . . "how melancholy, if there be such a thing as truth or certainty or possibility of knowledge—that a man should have lighted upon some argument or other which at first seemed true and then turned out to be false, and instead of blaming himself and his own want of wit, because he is annoyed should at last be too glad to transfer the blame from himself to arguments in general: and for ever afterwards should hate and revile them, and lose truth and the knowledge of realities".² "Let us", he therefore concludes, "in the first place be careful of allowing or of admitting into our souls the notion that there is no health or soundness in any arguments at all. Rather say that we have not yet attained to soundness in ourselves, and that we must struggle manfully and do our best to gain health of mind."³

These are the friendly exhortations given us by Plato, that we should never slacken in our efforts to win wisdom and knowledge. But even so, our inquiry is still unfinished. For there remains still one important problem which we

¹ *Phaedo* 89 D, E.² *Ib.* 90 C, D.³ *Ib.* 90 D, E.

have not yet approached so far, I mean the important question as to how we can regulate ourselves in our endeavour to attain to truth, when we are not allowed either to aspire to absolute knowledge or to leave our instruction to mere chance.

In answering this very momentous question, the Platonist would submit, I believe, that at any rate it cannot be done by the method advocated by the so-called Pragmatists, who advise us not to engage ourselves in any other problems except those that are a practical concern of ours. For, although in his method, the false ideal of absolute knowledge could be discarded, in that we should strive only after the solution of particular practical problems, it is sufficiently evident that this method would not provide us with any principle by which we could order our knowledge, so as to make it coherent and, as it were, an organic whole. Moreover, it is apparent that we can never know beforehand whether any question will or will not become relevant to us in the future, so that the advice to mind only practical questions becomes futile. And lastly, what is far worse, we might, following the counsel of the Pragmatists, postpone our investigations into certain matters so long that we should find ourselves, were a sudden emergency to make

that investigation urgent, in a helpless condition, because we should have already drifted into a situation where, in Livy's words, "we can no longer bear either our vices or their remedies".¹

The true answer to this problem therefore points, according to Plato, in an entirely different direction. It is, as far as I can see, merely this, that the philosopher must give his whole-hearted and lifelong allegiance to the Idea of Truth. Thus, it can be maintained, he will commit himself in a definite way so as to rescue his life from mere chance and chaos by giving it a single and clear purpose, and nevertheless not fall back into any kind of dogmatism. For since this commitment is not a commitment to any theoretical proposition or logical doctrine, but merely a pledge to serve, as long as he lives, a transcendent Idea, there is no reason why the philosopher should not remain able to examine everything that is presented to him without bias or prejudice, and yet not become a prey to confusion, as would result from mere arbitrariness.

But, if this solution may appear extraordinarily simple from a theoretical point of view, it will not prove to be so when we try to

¹ "Nec vitia nostra nec remedia pati possumus" (Praefatio). Cf. Proverbs i. 28 *sq.*: "Then they shall call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: For that they hated knowledge. . . ."

apply it in practice. For then we shall realize at once that no less is required from us than our unreserved and irrevocable surrender to the ideal of truth and wisdom. Philosophy, in other words, according to Plato, is a vocation for life, or it is nothing. It cannot be courted merely for a time and thereafter dismissed, nor can it be cultivated as a by-profession. If it is to become a reality at all, it is bound to take full possession of our minds and to be a supreme governor of our lives.¹ Thus understood, indeed, it cannot be the business of everyone. But this was never claimed to be so by the Platonists; on the contrary, it has always been their considered view, as every attentive reader of the *Republic* must know, that only a comparatively small number of men should engage themselves in philosophical inquiries, but that these few, in return, ought to apply themselves to them with their whole hearts and with undivided loyalty.

With this I might bring this chapter to a close. Since, however, we have had to travel over a comparatively wide ground, it seems to me advisable, before ending, to sum up once more the chief results, and to state briefly what,

¹ Cf. *Parm.* 130 E: καὶ οὐπω σου ἀντείληπται φιλοσοφία ὥς ἔτι ἀντιλήψεται κατ' ἐμὴν δόξαν.

in my opinion, may be said to be, so to speak, the principal hall-marks of a philosophy as conceived by Plato. And this seems to me to be the more recommendable, since philosophy, as understood by him, wants, as has just been said, our unconditional surrender, and since, as the Evangelist says,¹ it is always prudent to count the cost before we engage ourselves in an enterprise, lest in the end we should not be able to finish it, and should so become an object of just derision.

The first "hall-mark" of Platonism, then, I would say, is, that, by regarding philosophy as a lifelong devotion to the Idea of Truth, it makes an end of the self's central position in it. It is true that the philosopher, by accepting this conception of philosophy, will find his personal purpose in life; but it is no less true also that philosophy, thus understood, will urge him incessantly to forget himself, and to concentrate all his thoughts upon the Idea of Truth, to which he pledges himself to be faithful, whatever may be his personal experiences. And this, I believe, is the reason why the Platonist, in contradistinction to the modern philosophers, is so little concerned with the possibility of self-knowledge. His philosophy does not stand or

¹ See St. Luke xiv. 28-30.

fall together with the self; it is independent of it. For the initiative in philosophy, in his eyes, does not lie, as we said at the beginning of this chapter, in the philosopher's mind, but his work is rather a response to an outside call. To many a man, no doubt, such a surrender to a transcendent idea may seem equal to running the risk of losing the certain advantages of this visible world for the uncertain blessings of another, and perhaps only imaginary, world, and therefore to be deprecated in the name of prudence. Humanly speaking, this feeling would be intelligible enough, and yet the answer of the Platonist could not but be that all noble deeds of men in the end proceed from a venture of faith, and that prudence, though required in every particular action, cannot be the mainspring of any fundamental decision of ours, like that of leading a philosophical life. For if prudence were to be consulted in philosophical matters, there could be nothing more commendable than the first principle of the Pragmatists, not to become engaged in any other questions except those that concern us practically and immediately, which maxim, nevertheless, had to be rejected, as we may remember, not at the least for the reason that it was not good enough from the very prudential point of view. Therefore it seems actually

to be better to go the whole length of faith and to confess, with the Apostle, that "the foolishness of God is wiser than men",¹ and safer to run the risk with Plato than to waver irresolutely between the philosophical ideal and a worldly-wise mode of life; for, as he says,² "beautiful is the adventure, and the hope great".

Secondly, when, following Plato's teaching in the *Republic*, the Platonist declares that philosophy is the profession of only some few people, and not the concern of all, he accepts the great principle of the division of labour which permeates the life of civilized men, making them dependent on each other. And so he is again opposed to the main trend of Modern Philosophy. For whereas the average modern philosopher, in pursuance, as it seems, of the Stoical ideal of the wise man's self-sufficiency, tries to find out mainly for himself a satisfactory explanation of the universe, the Platonist thinks preponderantly in social terms. In his eyes such a solitary wisdom as that conceived by the Stoics is not an ideal at all, but a very pernicious idol. He is convinced that final truth is beyond man, that we all have to struggle alike incessantly against the inroads of ignorance, and that there

¹ 1 Cor. i. 25.

² *Phaedo* 114 C: καλὸν γὰρ τὸ ἀθλόν καὶ ἡ ἐλπίς μεγάλη.

must be some leaders in this kind of warfare. At the same time, he is fully conscious of the fact that he can devote himself whole-heartedly to his vocation, only because there are other men who either cultivate the several empirical sciences, or work as philanthropists for the vindication of justice and mercy, or try as artists to shed on our lives the light of beauty, or as priests strive for the "maintainance of true religion and virtue", not to speak of the still greater number of those who serve the common welfare of mankind by providing for its more immediate needs and conveniences. Consequently it would seem to him to be an injustice and a sin were he to try to retain the discovered truth within his own bosom, and were he not to attempt, to the best of his abilities, to communicate it to as many other people as are likely to profit by it. Moreover, the Platonist is inclined to assume that, just as he is dependent on his fellow-men for, so to speak, all the necessities of his life (and for a few innocuous luxuries to boot), so probably his thoughts too are not by far as original as his pride is prone to flatter him that they are; but that they in all likelihood are, for the overwhelming part, nothing more than the suggestions of others. And this, I believe, is another and very forcible reason which prevents

him from considering his thoughts his own exclusive property, and which prompts him to adopt a public-spirited attitude in life.

Thirdly. If philosophy means, above all, loyalty to the Idea of Truth, then it is the chief duty of the philosopher to preserve his character as philosopher, and results become of secondary importance. They are, as we may say, like the fruit of the tree; they ripen when their season has arrived; they must not be made to grow faster by artificial stimulants, lest not only they, but the whole tree that bears them, be corrupted and wither away. The philosopher, therefore, must never press for them, but merely keep alive his willingness to learn and his sense of moral responsibility. He must take to himself the beautiful admonition of St. Thomas Aquinas, who says that "God ordained that we should not be anxious about that which is no concern of ours, namely the effect of our actions, but He did not forbid us to be anxious about that which is our concern, namely our proper work".¹ It is unavoidable, of course, that this uncompromising demeanour of the Platonist will render him unpopular with many men, and rob him, to a

¹ *S.c.G.* iii. 135: "Praecipit . . . Dominus nos non debere esse sollicitos de eo quod ad nos non pertinet, scilicet de eventibus nostrarum actionum, non autem prohibuit nos esse sollicitos de eo quod ad nos pertinet, scilicet de nostro opere".

certain extent, of what is called success in life. It is unthinkable indeed, that Platonism could ever find favour with the majority of men. For the greater part of those not directly connected with philosophical work, and even, unfortunately, a not inconsiderable number of those who call themselves philosophers, seem to care for nothing more than results; they will turn away with anger from a thinker who does not appear willing to provide them with such. To their cry, however, the Platonist is obliged to turn a deaf ear. He must cling to his better belief that, first, there are no such final results, and that, secondly, if there were, their promulgation would still be undesirable, since it could have no other effect than to pander to intellectual complacency, and to lead towards spiritual stagnation. He must be conscious, moreover, that he would act against his own avowed intent of making people think, and of so rescuing them from the prejudices of their surroundings, and from the danger of becoming a prey to ignorance and presumption, were he to regale them with ready-made solutions. Consequently it is his duty to accept this "unpopularity" as a part of the special cross which he, as a philosopher, has to bear, and to think that he would indeed be an ignoble creature, if he were not willing to do so

cheerfully, in view of the manifold joys that he otherwise reaps from the pursuit of his studies and from a quiet mind to which they conduce.¹

And fourthly and lastly, it is obvious that, if the Platonist pledges himself to a lifelong allegiance to the Idea of Truth, his life must be in a way under a vow. Such a vow, it may be said, is indispensable for a philosophy as conceived by Plato. For it is only thus that a man is able to commit himself to a definite walk of life, without at the same time pledging himself to any pre-conceived doctrine, and thus impairing his intellectual freedom and responsibility. But here

¹ It seems to me that the great difference between Plato and Aristotle, which has in practice always been felt to exist, even where it is not recognized in theory, lies mainly in this, that the latter wanted, above all, results, whereas the former did not. I will not here fall again into the habit, familiar among Platonists, of reviling Aristotle. He was, in his way, certainly a quite outstanding man. But this much, I think, may safely be said of him, that he was far more a scientist than a philosopher, that in him the passion for both truth and righteousness, which is the driving force of philosophy, was replaced by an unquenchable thirst for mere knowledge, though of a veritably encyclopaedic range; and that, probably for his one great lack of theoretical interest, namely in mathematics, his thought is not always clear nor, epistemologically speaking, critical enough. I cannot help sympathizing, therefore, with Atticus, a minor Platonist of the second century A.D. who writes (see *Eus. Caes. Praep. Ev.* xv. 4): τοῦτων τοίνυν οὕτως ἔχόντων, καὶ πειρωμένοι τοῦ Πλάτωνος ἔλκειν τὰς τῶν νέων ψυχὰς ἄνω που πρὸς τὸ θεῖον, καὶ τοῦτον τὸν τρόπον προσοικειοῦντος μὲν τῇ ἀρετῇ καὶ τῷ καλῷ, τῶν δὲ ἄλλων ἀπάντων ἀναπεύθοντος ὑπερφρονεῖν φράσον ἡμῖν, ὦ Περιπατητικέ, πῶς ἐκδιδάξεις ταῦτα;

again the Platonist must be prepared for the fact that he will often be misunderstood. It cannot be helped that, in the eyes of the majority of people, anything in the nature of a vow in favour of an idea seems to be dangerous, if not mischievous, because, as they say, it binds men unconditionally, whereas in life, as they ought to know, there can emerge at any moment unforeseen situations that might arouse in them the desire to retrace their steps. To these objections, I believe, the Platonist would reply that he is fully alive to their weight, but that they do not apply to his special case, since he does not pledge himself to any theory or to any preconceived rule of conduct, but merely to the resolution to face every new situation in his life with reference to the Idea of Truth, in order then to decide, to the best of his abilities, how to think about, and how to act upon it. And thus, because the possibility and even probability of changing situations is taken into consideration, there cannot be anything unreasonable in his decision. That from a merely logical point of view a vow cannot be defensible, he will grant indeed; but he will point out that, by mere logic, no great enterprise in life has yet been started, because mere logic would hold men in perpetual suspense and never allow them to decide for or

against anything at all. And so, finally, I think, he will maintain boldly and unblushingly that his life is, in fact, somehow a dedicated life, and that no one who has not acted like himself, and one day paid personally some similar vow before the throne of the Heavenly Grace, can ever hope to become a genuine philosopher and a true member of the Platonic brotherhood.

THUS it might appear that our study of Plato's conception of philosophy had now reached its natural end. And actually, in a certain sense, I believe, it has. For from what has been said in the last chapter, there has emerged, I trust, a consistent and coherent theory of what philosophy might both do and be.

And yet, in one respect, our investigation must still be regarded as deficient. Namely, so far we have been contemplating only the reasons which may determine an individual man to take up the profession of a philosopher; we have not spoken at all yet of the manifold social implications of philosophy, of the means by which it can be promoted in public life, and of the resistance and the various obstacles which it is bound to meet with in this field. And as long as this omission has not been made good, the essay would still be incomplete.

For the Platonist, moreover, it may be said that this social aspect of philosophy is especially important. For the Platonist, as we have seen, does not think mainly in individualistic terms;

he is essentially a public-spirited man. He has no admiration for the modern theory, according to which philosophy and religion are a merely private concern. This doctrine seems to him a fundamental mistake. To him it is perfectly clear that every thought, and still more the promulgation of a thought, is a public act which cannot be disregarded as insignificant by the social community, since it is on the foundation of thoughts and opinions that men's practical habits and customs evolve, and since it depends preponderantly on their way of thinking whether they become good or bad citizens.

And, if it is evident that the public cannot be disinterested in the thought of each individual man, it is obvious also that the philosopher cannot afford to be unmindful of the thought of the public either. And this, I believe, for two reasons. First, it lies to a great extent with the public whether his endeavour is encouraged or hampered. It is idle to fancy that his work can prosper in a thoroughly indifferent or even hostile surrounding. And secondly, if the philosopher is to fight for truth and righteousness, then he must do so at all times and in all circumstances; he cannot limit the compass of his activity by making it co-extensive with the sphere of his merely personal interests; he necessarily must try

to make his ideals prevail in the wider field of social life as well. It is true, of course, that his work has to begin with himself. But this is only for the tactical reason that

He who would fight for truth on earth
Must first be true within.¹

It does not justify the assumption that philosophy is not more than a private concern. For if such were true, then philosophy would be robbed at once of its missionary zeal and be transformed into a mere pursuit of knowledge for selfish ends. It is therefore to be presumed that the theory of the private character of philosophy has been invented for no other purpose than to help the thinker to divest himself of the obvious social duties laid upon his shoulders by his profession.

So it would seem that the true philosopher is driven, as it were from within, to social activity. It may be, no doubt, that he has to retire for a time from public life, because the time is not yet ripe for the acceptance of his message; but he must never give up the attempt of influencing society. If he meets with temporary set-backs, he has merely to start afresh. This has been beautifully brought out by Plato in a memorable

¹ Thomas Hughes. See English Hymnal No. 449. The original wording, to be sure, is "for thee on earth"; but the meaning is the same.

passage of the *Republic*. There it is said that the philosopher in evil days "holds his peace, and goes his own way. He is like one who, in the storm of dust and sleet which the driving wind hurries along, retires under the shelter of a wall; and, seeing the rest of mankind full of wickedness, he is content, if only he can live his own life and be pure from evil or unrighteousness, and depart in peace and goodwill, with bright hopes."—"Yes, and he will have done a great work before he departs."—"A great work—yes; but not the greatest, unless he find a State suitable to him; for in a State which is suitable to him, he will have a larger growth and be the saviour of his country, as well as of himself."¹ It is noteworthy that, in spite of heart-breaking experiences, Plato has never given up this view. In the *Laws* we meet with the same idea again. "Worthy of honour", he says there,² "is he who does not injustice, and of more than twofold honour, if he not only does no injustice himself, but hinders others from doing any; the first may count as one man, the second is worth many men."³

But if the philosopher has thus to strive to vindicate, in the dealings of social groups and

¹ 496 D-497 A.

² 730 D.

³ ὁ μὲν γὰρ ενός, ὁ δὲ πολλῶν ἀντάξιος ἑτέρων.

associations of men, the same principles which rule his private life, he must not be blind to the fact that there are some obstacles which render this work extremely hard, and which cannot be removed because they are rooted in the very nature of things. There is, first of all, the great impediment that social life never reaches the same high level of disinterestedness as the life of an individual and truly public-spirited man. The reason for it is not difficult to perceive. It is simply this, that, as a representative of a social class or community, I cannot bring the same sacrifices for an ideal purpose that I might bring in my capacity as a private person. For as a representative of a social body I have always to stand up, in the first instance, for the rights and interests of that body; I am not allowed to give away advantages which I have no licence to dispose of alone. Christianity, writes Dr. Inge,¹ "is never likely to be a popular creed. As surely as the presence of high spiritual instincts in the human mind guarantees its indestructibility, so surely the deeply-rooted prejudices which keep the majority on a lower level must prevent the Gospel of Christ from dominating mundane politics or social life." And this applies not only to Christianity, but to any other spiritual

¹ *Outspoken Essays*, i. 250.

effort of a high standard as well. A philosopher must therefore not expect that his aspirations will be adequately realized in social life. To do so would only cause disappointment and unreasonable pessimism within his mind.

A second obstacle which stands in the way of philosophy in public affairs is the fact that the conscience of any association of men can never be stirred in the same sense as the conscience of an individual man. In every association responsibility is weakened in proportion to the degree of its being distributed among a plurality of consciences. A collection of men, accordingly, may tolerate evils as unavoidable which no individual man, as such, could account for, and may leave things undone which every individual, when called upon, would regard as his undeniable duty to do. Society, or what may be called the "world", may therefore be said to be "a system of co-operative guilt with limited liability".¹ Consequently, it is not astonishing when philosophers, as a rule, are shy to face a crowd. They know that before a multitude their arguments are useless. For what a multitude wants is not a set of well-balanced reasonings which must be weighed by their intelligence, but slogans that touch their emotions, as has been brought out

¹ Dr. Inge, *op. cit.* ii. 156.

in so masterly a way by Le Bon in his *Psychologie des Foules*; and whereas the only weapon in the hand of a philosopher is a reasoned appeal to the moral consciousness of each individual man, crowds can always defend themselves and attack the philosopher behind the shield of anonymity. From which it follows that the appropriate method of propagating philosophical matters is not that of addressing large gatherings, that is, of wholesale publicity, but rather of intimate individual persuasion.

Plato, as we may expect, knew of this full well. It was no secret to him that it is extremely difficult to combine the profession of a philosopher with holding a public position. He saw that, either the social duties connected with that position would make it almost impossible for the philosopher to maintain the standard of genuine philosophy, or the philosopher, if he strove to keep faithful to his philosophical ideal, would rouse such an amount of indignation that even his life might become endangered. Thus he lets Socrates say in the *Apology*:¹ "I am certain, O men of Athens, that if I had engaged in politics, I should have perished long ago, and done no good either to you or to myself. And do not be offended at my telling you the truth: for

¹ 31 D-32 A.

the truth is, that no man who goes to war with you or any other multitude, honestly striving against the many lawless and unrighteous deeds which are done in a state, will save his life; he who will fight for the right, if he would live even for a brief space, must have a private station and not a public one."

This may be slightly exaggerated. In any case it would not be safe to try to settle this difficult question, as it were, beforehand, and to assert that the philosopher must in all circumstances be a private person. What has to be done must rather be decided anew in each instance according to the situation at the particular moment. And on the whole, it seems to me that we might lay it down as a general rule that the philosopher, if he can get an official position on his own terms, ought to accept the offer gladly, since he would thus be provided with a welcome opportunity to spread his ideas; but that, on the other hand, if he should come to feel that his work was endangered by his holding a public office, he ought to be prepared at the same time for immediate "disestablishment". For this much is certain: genuine, *i.e.* Platonic, philosophy can never be used as a means for a public career; and whenever there arises a conflict between his duties towards his profession and the duties

towards his social environment, the Platonist cannot but decide in favour of the former. Nevertheless, with this we do not mean to say that philosophy and a public station are mutually exclusive ideas, or that the philosophical and the social profession could never be reconciled; what must be emphasized is merely this, that for combining them exceptionally favourable conditions are required, and that even then the position of the philosopher in society would still be precarious.

Nor should it be forgotten that Plato, when he spoke of the philosopher's social environment, had in his mind mainly the Greek City State, which was in most cases a capricious and incalculable little commonwealth. A modern thinker, however, especially if he should happen to be a Christian, would, I believe, rather look up to the Church or the churches as the social frame within which he was to do his work. And here, it seems to me, he could hope more confidently to meet with understanding and sympathy than from any mere political community. For, after all, the Church was founded with the definite purpose that it should stand for the Kingdom of Truth and Righteousness here on earth; it is therefore pledged to almost the same ideal as the Platonic philosopher. And yet, in

spite of this common goal, it would not be prudent for the philosopher to rely too much on the churches either. For a church, as a social body that must live in this world, has often to adopt measures which make more for its self-preservation than for the furtherance of the Kingdom of Heaven; it is as a social organism subjected, to some extent, to the laws of necessity that permeate the secular life, and bound in a certain measure to come to terms with the world. And so it would not be altogether surprising that, even with regard to certain churches, the Platonic philosopher might find himself in an embarrassing position.¹

Such, I believe, are the difficulties of the philosopher in his search for a social status. But even if he should give up hope to work in public, and retire to a strictly private life, he could not reasonably expect to be left alone and to remain free from trouble. For whatever he might do in particular, he could not help rousing the suspicion of his neighbours by his general nonconformity to the average standards and fashions of the time, and by his standing aloof from the ordinary life of the community in which

¹ I shall have more to say on this question in the course of my next study.

he was living. To those who had come to terms more or less with the world, his "other-worldliness" would inevitably appear to bring a constant reproach upon their manner of life, so that his mere existence would be resented. They would probably feel within themselves, in the language of the Book of Wisdom, that the philosopher "was made to reprove our thoughts. He is grievous unto us even to behold: for his life is not like other men's, his ways are of another fashion. We are esteemed of him as counterfeits: he abstaineth from our ways as from filthiness . . . he upbraideth us with our offending the law, and objecteth to our infamy the transgressings of our education."¹ And so the result would probably be that the philosopher would be slandered, and said to be a man who lived in idle fancies, who had never grown to full manhood, but instead was carrying on indefinitely those studies which it might be judged right to be interested in as a youth, but which it was incumbent on a man to give up in later life, in order to fill a place in society or in the state, if he did not want to become a parasite. And if he should feel tempted to give advice in any matter whatever, he would presumably be reminded forthwith that, for not having succeeded in

¹ 2, 14-16 A, 12 B.

getting any public position, he was not entitled to interfere with the business of those men who had taken upon themselves the burden of discharging their civic duties.

In Plato's writing we find this kind of impeachment of philosophy entrusted to Callicles, the principal figure besides Socrates in the dialogue called *Gorgias*. "Philosophy," he says there, "if pursued in moderation and at the proper age, is an elegant accomplishment, but too much philosophy is the ruin of human life."¹ For if a man "carries philosophy into later life, he is necessarily ignorant of all those things which a gentleman and a person of honour ought to know; he is inexperienced in the laws of the State, and in the language which ought to be used in the dealings of man with man, whether private or public, and utterly ignorant of the pleasures and desires of mankind and of human character in general".² "I should like to beat him, Socrates; for, as I was saying, such a one, even though he have good natural parts, becomes effeminate. He flies from the busy centre and the market-place, in which,

¹ 484 C. Cf. Cicero, *De Fin.* i. 1. 1: "Nam quibusdam, et iis quidem non admodum indoctis, totum hoc displicet, philosophari. Quidam autem non tam id reprehendunt, si remissius agatur; sed tantum studium tamque multam operam ponendam in eo non arbitrantur."

² *Ib.* 484 C, D.

as the poet says, men become distinguished; he creeps into a corner for the rest of his life, and talks in a whisper with three or four admiring youths, but never speaks out like a freeman in a satisfactory manner."¹ Therefore "what is the value of an 'art which converts a man of sense into a fool', who is helpless, and has no power to save either himself or others, when he is in the greatest danger and is going to be despoiled by his enemies of all his goods, and has to live, simply deprived of his rights of citizenship?"² "For the suffering of injustice is not the part of a man, but of a slave, who indeed had better die than live; since when he is wronged and trampled upon he is unable to help himself, or any other about whom he cares."³

These are grave accusations, no doubt, and especially so, since it cannot be denied that they contain a good deal of truth. But, taken as a whole, they are nevertheless, I am convinced, wide of the mark. We shall therefore do well, I would suggest, if we listen to what Plato has to say in favour of his profession. And for this, I would add, we may feel the more inclined, because it is to be presumed that a man who was skilful enough to compose such an eloquent

¹ *Ib.* 485 D, E.² *Ib.* 486 B, C.³ *Ib.* 483 B.

plea against philosophy, might be equally well equipped for a statement in its defence.

In the first instance, then, I believe, Plato would frankly admit that philosophy cannot transform its devotees into efficient champions of their own private interests, that it actually compels them to forgo many advantages which belong to the secular life, and that, in political dangers, it would probably leave them in as fairly helpless a condition as Callicles describes. But, he would retort to his accusers, ought the value of human endeavour to be gauged by the standard of public approbation? "Do you think that all our cares should be directed to prolonging life to the uttermost, and to the study of those arts which secure us from danger always?"¹ Or is not Dr. Inge right, when he says that "what the world calls success consists almost invariably in extracting from society, in one form or another, a much larger recompense than is due, whether we consider the time and trouble expended, or the reasonable wants of the recipient"?²

Further, Plato would strongly deny that there is no courage required in philosophy. On the contrary, he would insist with the greatest

¹ *Gorg.* 511 B.

² *Christian Ethics and Modern Problems*, p. 64.

emphasis that there is no philosophy worth mentioning that does not exhibit a fair measure of it. Only, he would remark, it is another and probably less spectacular kind of courage that befits the philosopher, than that which is called for, say, in a political or military career. For whereas the courage of the soldier consists mainly in a sort of instinctive fearlessness in the face of acute danger, and the courage of the politician in the steadfastness with which he is able to run risks which might well cost him his popularity and his reputation, and occasionally to strike down an opponent in the arena of political controversy, the philosopher has to manifest his courage in standing up for principles and in adhering faithfully to them, even if everyone else should be afraid to give them his allegiance any longer. As such a principle that the philosopher has stoutly to defend, I would mention, for instance, the maxim that "it is impossible to maintain that what is disgraceful for the individual is creditable for the state".¹ "I have been always the same in all my actions, public as well as private",² says Socrates in the *Apology*. This sounds simple enough, and yet we know that this condemnation of a double moral standard in private and public life twice involved him in

¹ Dr. Inge, *Outspoken Essays*, i. 40.

² 33 A.

the utmost danger. For Plato tells us¹ that after the battle of the Arginusae, Socrates alone among all the councillors withstood the unjust decree of his city, by which the ten admirals were condemned to death without being granted a fair trial, for having been unable to pick up the shipwrecked crews after the engagement, although it was threatened that, whosoever should do so, would share the same fate with them; and that not long afterwards, under the régime of the so-called "Thirty", he alone again refused to become an accomplice in the illegal arrest of a certain citizen of Salamis named Leon, where he "might well have lost his life but for the downfall of the 'Thirty' ".² Consequently, it would not be just to assert that the true philosopher is not a courageous man. Rather would it seem that his courage is of a higher order than that of the politician or the soldier; for, while it may be supposed that the philosopher is always conscious of the consequences of his actions, the politician and the soldier are certainly often not.

Nor would it be justifiable to bring against the philosopher the opprobrium that he is trying to evade his social duties by prolonging certain studies which are non-committal in character,

¹ *Apol.* 32 A-E.

² Professor A. E. Taylor, *Plato, the Man and his Work*, p. 165.

and which he pursues solely for the sake of gratifying his intellectual curiosity. For although it is true that the philosopher is prepared, in a way, to remain a learner all throughout life, it would be entirely erroneous to suppose that he was decided to be so for no better reason than to get rid of his responsibilities as a citizen in practical life. That would be too bad to be true. In fact, it is something utterly different that lies at the bottom of his decision to lead a philosophical life. It is, if I am not mistaken, some reflexion like the following: "Suppose that there is a civilization which is in danger of losing touch with truth and reality,—and this danger seems to be always present to a certain extent,—what in the end could bring it back again to its senses? What, moreover, would be, in such a situation, the value of even the finest works of art and the most unselfish acts of philanthropy and charity, if, meanwhile, life as a whole was allowed to drift away from its solid foundation, and become more and more a mere loose bundle of artificially maintained conventions which, being related to no great central faith, could scarcely convey any meaning? Could there be found any other remedy than the decision of some men to attempt first to think out fearlessly things anew for themselves, and then to try to

make other people think as well, in order to free them from the superficiality of the fashions and prejudices of the age, and from the *taedium vitae* that invariably accompanies slackness of thought?" In this way, it seems to me, it can be demonstrated that the philosopher's profession is founded, no less than that of the more practical servant of the public welfare, on the rock of a quick sense of social duty and responsibility. The only great difference between him and the philosopher is, that whereas the practical man, as a rule, is responsible to human society, or to the state, for some tangible results, the philosopher has to give account for his work before the invisible tribunal of an Idea. Thus, of course, he cannot avoid being often misunderstood; for, in Plato's words, "as he forgets earthly interests and is rapt in the divine, the vulgar deem him mad, and rebuke him; they do not see that he is inspired".¹ Yet, this does not alter the fact that his work proceeds from considerations regarding the public good, and is intended to be a real service to the community, no less than that of any other representative of the so-called professional class.

Moreover, it might be said,—and with this we already leave our defensive lines for a counter-

¹ *Phaedrus* 249 D.

attack,—that, of all attitudes towards life, only that of the philosopher can truly be regarded as making for ultimate consistency and, consequently, for ultimate contentment. For when the philosopher strives to find out what is best for himself and for the community in which he has been placed by Providence, then he is obviously trying to find his appropriate place in the general scheme of things, that is, the position where he can do his proper work most efficiently and become the man he really is; whereas the man who gives full rein to his worldly desires and ambitions, be it in the field of property, honour, or even knowledge, cannot but find that, the more he acquires, the more insatiate do his wants become, so that in the end his fate is almost like that of the Danaids, who, as the legend goes, are condemned to the never-ending and useless attempt of filling a sieve with water.¹ In public life, in the sphere of claims and counterclaims, the philosopher, to be sure, is subjected to the same vicissitudes of fortune as the man of the world; but while the latter has to face this stormy sea with a heart that is rent, as it were, even within, by its contradictory aims, the philosopher is at least at one with himself. And this is a tremendous advantage. For there

¹ Comp. *Gorg.* 493 B.

is scarcely any greater blessing in this life than a true peace of mind. "My friend", says Socrates to Callicles,¹ "I would rather that my lyre should be inharmonious, and that there should be no music in the chorus which I provided; aye, or that the whole world should be at odds with me, and oppose me, rather than that I myself should be at odds with myself, and contradict myself"; and in that he is evidently right, for, after all, my own self is that to which I am bound with the closest ties imaginable.

So it appears, then, that the principle of consistency is of great value to the life of an individual man. It is, however, of still greater value to the life of a social community or a commonwealth. For whereas an individual man cannot live well without aiming at consistency, it seems as if a civilization could not live long at all without it, but would sooner or later be doomed to fall to pieces, being blown up, so to speak, by the explosion of disruptive forces from within. And here I am obliged to give a warning against a misunderstanding which is widely spread, and which has done a great deal of harm to genuine philosophy. Namely it must not be imagined that the principle of consistency, when applied to the requirements of social life,

¹ Comp. *Gorg.* 482 B, C.

will of necessity involve the philosopher in a vain attempt to eliminate all troubles and hardships from it, as if he were incapable of withstanding them. Nothing could be further from the truth than that. For in making this assumption, we should confound at once the true philosopher with his caricature, the romantic dreamer who shows his lack of sense for realities, in that he hankers after a sort of paradise to be established here on earth, a paradise, which nevertheless, if it actually should come one day, would leave him in the greatest perplexity as to what he ought to do in the next half an hour, since there could remain apparently nothing further to be achieved or striven for. From such idle speculations the Platonic philosopher is entirely free. He knows full well that, without the stimulus given by what we call "evil", our human activity would come to a standstill, and, consequently, that to remove all struggle from the world would be tantamount to abolishing life altogether. This, I would say, has become quite axiomatic with him; it does not even occur to him any longer in his dreams that it might be otherwise.¹ But if evil in general is thus in a way

¹ See *Theaet.* 176 A: 'Αλλ' οὐτ' ἀπολέσθαι τὰ κακὰ δυνατόν, ὦ Θεόδωρε—ὑπεναντίον γάρ τι τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἀεὶ εἶναι ἀνάγκη—οὐτ' ἐν θεοῖς αὐτὰ ἰδρῦσθαι, τὴν δὲ θνητὴν φύσιν καὶ τόνδε τὸν τρόπον περιπολεῖ ἐξ ἀνάγκης.

inseparable from human life, it is at the same time no secret to the Platonist that every particular evil or every particular disagreement as to what we have to think and to do must not be suffered to grow unchecked for an unlimited time. For should it be left uncurbed, it would infect, like a contagious disease, all things with which it came into contact, and would thereby grow to such dimensions that, in the end, it would be found to be beyond our control and would become a real menace to civilization; because, let us not forget, our human power to endure things is not unlimited. Therefore it seems that the philosopher has in fact not to try to find out for our social life the line of least resistance, since thus its vitality would be impaired, but rather to make an attempt to determine which of the present evils must, in the interest of the whole community, be stopped, and which, in the same interest, must be patiently borne, and then to endeavour to concentrate his efforts and those of his fellow-men on the problem where they are most urgently needed.

It would not be reasonable to expect a similar attitude from the man of the world. For although it would be certainly wrong to say of him that he was utterly selfish and totally unmindful of the welfare of the whole,—for such a man does

not exist,¹—it is nevertheless a fact that, *qua* man of the world, he has not got a principle that makes for a consistently good life, but that, if he actually does the right thing, he does it by mere chance. Simultaneously he is never safe from the temptation to do what is hurtful to other people. For since he has no other guide than expediency, and since it is only in the long run that selfish actions get their revenge, he sees that it is quite possible to live a long time successfully by doing wrong, and by sponging on the labours of others. And in this calculation he is, unfortunately, not mistaken. Indeed experience shows plainly that, from a merely secular point of view, it often pays extraordinarily well to live in accordance with the adage *Après nous le déluge*; for although it is absolutely certain that, with regard to the human race as a whole, “our sins will find us out”, it is not at all unthinkable that the repercussions of our faults will not be felt by ourselves or by our own generation, but that they will be “visited”, as it is intimated they may, only “upon our children” or children’s

¹ Plato shows this in the First Book of the *Republic* (cf. 351 A–352 D), by pointing out that the absolutely selfish man would, by his selfishness, become disconnected with our world to such an extent as to cease to be a part of it. It is, I believe, significant, too, that Christ never speaks of men who have no faith whatever, but that his exclamation is always: “O ye of little faith”.

children.¹ Against this constant temptation to decide in favour of bad, or, what amounts to the same, parasitical actions, it would therefore again appear that a man can be only protected by the "other-worldly" standard of the philosopher, with whose help he can lay down rules which, though subject to later possible rectifications and improvements, would nevertheless contain a sort of minimum command that he would, under no circumstances, be allowed to transgress. From adopting this method, however, the man of the world is debarred. Consequently it would seem that his actions are good only when, from his unpredictable inclinations, he chances to follow the same advices that he would get if he applied himself to philosophy; but there is not given us the slightest guarantee that, being a man of the world, he will not act wrong again even in the same circumstances and in the near future, since he has no principle by which he might guide his conduct according to constant rules, and become, in a true sense, the captain of his heart.

But by far the greatest reason in favour of

¹ This thought is brought out beautifully by the "Preacher". See Eccl. viii. 11: "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil". Many good suggestions may also be gathered from Plutarch's fine treatise, *De sera numinis vindicta*.

philosophy, and against a merely secular life, is, in Plato's opinion, the consideration that, in the final choice between things temporal and things eternal, or between appearance and reality, the secularist takes the wrong side. For if there is something beyond the grave, if there is an eternal being and something in us which can have communion with that eternal being, of whom, as we have seen, the Platonist is even much more convinced than of his own existence, then it must appear to be the height of temerity not to live accordingly. "Those who are pledged to this world and the injustice inseparable from it", says Plato in the *Theaetetus*,¹ "do not know the penalty of injustice, which above all things they ought to know—not stripes and death, as they suppose, which evil-doers often escape, but a penalty which cannot be escaped".—"What is that?"—"There are two patterns eternally set before them; the one blessed and divine, the other godless and wretched: but they do not see them, or perceive that in their utter folly and infatuation they are growing like the one and unlike the other, by reason of their evil deeds; and the penalty is, that they lead a life answering to the pattern which they are growing like."

This, then, I believe, is Plato's answer to the

¹ 176 D-177 A.

detractors of philosophy. At the same time he does not expect that his arguments will convince the man of the world. For they are all based on the assumption that there is something "beyond", and this assumption is not amenable to strict logical proof. It contains, like every other philosophical conviction, only reasoned truth, and could, at its best, be corroborated by the indirect method of showing that the principle underlying the secular life, if there can be said to be any (which, strictly speaking, it cannot), would manifest itself, when examined thoroughly, to be meaningless; but even this reasoning would be conclusive only for the philosopher, who seems to believe so much in principles that he tries to find such even where there are, practically speaking, none, and not for his opponent, who does not care for principles at all. Accordingly it would appear that the philosopher must be content, if his plea for the philosophical profession leaves behind in the mind of the man of the world some sort of bewilderment, and if it elicits the slightly embarrassed but still mainly incredulous remark: "Tell me . . . are you in earnest or only in jest? For if you are in earnest, and what you say is true, is not the whole of human life turned upside down; and are we not doing, as would appear,

in everything the opposite of what we ought to be doing?."¹

But, it will be asked, if things be so, what can the philosopher do to persuade his antagonists of the truth of his cause? To this question, I believe, the Platonic answer is unambiguously clear: He must show not in words, but in deeds, that he means what he says. That is, in other words, he simply has to carry on his work and to go his way through good or bad with the constancy of Wordsworth's Happy Warrior:

Who comprehends his trust and to the same
Keeps faithful with a singleness of aim.

And thus, Plato is convinced, if only he perseveres long enough, he will come to see in the end that he can convince, although not all, at least those whom it is worth having on his side, and that he can win also, sooner or later, the respect, and perhaps even the confidence, of his fellow-men at large, so that the disabilities, under which, as we have seen in the opening of this chapter, he is labouring at the start of his career, will gradually disappear.

This path, of course, is long and laborious; wherefore we must not be astonished when we find that there are comparatively few who are

¹ *Gorg.* 481 c.

willing to tread it. Moreover, it cannot be denied that to go along it demands some real sacrifices from the philosopher. For the secular life, let us frankly admit, has certain attractive qualities of its own, no less than the philosophical, and these the philosopher has to forgo for the benefit of what, in the eyes of many, is no better than the life of a monk.

Consequently, it can be understood, although not condoned, that there are thinkers who cannot resist the temptation to combine the blessings of the philosophical vocation with the advantages of a secular life, on the plea of comprehensiveness. Now comprehensiveness, it is true, is a high philosophical ideal indeed; but if purchased at the expense of intellectual and moral integrity, it is bought at too high a price. And that, I am afraid, is what happens to those thinkers just referred to. For if they attempt to reconcile "other-worldliness" with "worldliness", then they neglect, first, their moral duty, which commands them to make up their minds for the one or the other side, since it is impossible to decide at once in favour of two different ultimate ends, nor permissible to leave that choice indefinitely in the balance; and if, notwithstanding this plain fact, they persist in their non-

committal attitude, they will soon find themselves obliged, secondly, to dethrone reason, too, from being their guide in life, since reason would not cease to teach them what things are compatible with each other, and what things are not, and to commit themselves for the future to their mere fancies and emotions, that is, to those turgid faculties of the human mind which, for being not over-delicate in their selection of means, may enable them to intermix mutually exclusive aims also. Add to this, finally, that the principle of comprehensiveness itself, if taken as the highest aim in philosophy, will turn out to be an essentially selfish maxim, which is utterly at variance with that loyalty to the Idea of Truth or Wisdom which we found to be required from the genuine philosopher, and there can clearly be no means of escape, but that their philosophy becomes highly objectionable. Not only must it be said to be insincere, an accusation especially grave when applied to a philosopher, but unintelligible as well: for, as their doctrine is constantly oscillating between the two poles of transcendence and immanence, we cannot guess what it is actually meant to stand for.

If there were required some historical examples of this type of philosophy, I would point to the three great German romanticists after

Kant: Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. In Fichte, I would say, we never know for certain whether the Absolute already exists or whether it has still to be created by our own efforts; nor can we be sure where we have to turn for his real message, whether to the *Way to a Blessed Life*,¹ in which he preaches a kind of quietist mysticism, or to the *Addresses to the German Nation*² in which he almost abuses philosophy as a means for the practical and political aspirations of his own people. Schelling again astonishes us with his doctrine of the "intellectual perception", that is, a kind of divine oracle by which the philosopher, or at least he himself, was alleged to be able to penetrate the nature of things, and with the fact that he remained so faithful to this oracle that, although it betrayed to any unprejudiced mind a lower origin than that claimed for it by him, by revealing to him in turn at least three, if not five, different systems of philosophy, he affirmed them all with the same unbending vehemence. From the works of Hegel, lastly, it is again difficult to gather whether his true intention was to say that the activity of the "Absolute Spirit" in art, religion, and philosophy, is only part of an immanent self-develop-

¹ *Anweisung zum seligen Leben.*

² *Reden an die deutsche Nation.*

ment of the highest principle in time, or whether in art, religion, or philosophy, all things temporal are mere symbols that remind us of an "Absolute" beyond the sphere of time, that never will become adequately manifested here on earth; and this secret was so well kept by him during his lifetime, that even his intimate pupils did not know what he actually thought; for after his death, we learn, his school was immediately split up into two rival camps, into a right wing that made their master into a champion of religion, and into a left wing that proclaimed him to be father to a movement whose aim was distinctly secular.¹

Thus, therefore, it would appear in conclusion, that there are only the alternatives, either to go the whole way with philosophy, and to shoulder all the duties connected with it, or to abstain from it altogether. Accordingly, let every one who wants to become a philosopher first reflect whether he is able to bear the burden, but then, when he deems himself fit for, and worthy of, the task, cling unwaveringly to the high ideal as set up by Plato, and be mindful of the stern

¹ The same fate, it might be said, was in store for Hegelianism abroad. For in England it led to the mystical philosophy of Bradley, and in Italy to the thoroughgoing doctrine of immanentism of Benedetto Croce.

admonition given him by the "Shepherd of Hermas," always and everywhere to "keep clear of double-mindedness".¹

¹ *Mand.* 9. 1: ἄρον ἀπὸ σεαυτοῦ τὴν διψυχίαν.

IN this concluding chapter, I do not intend to introduce any further material considerations concerning the Platonic conception of philosophy. It seems to me that I have by now put forward all that I wanted to say about it. I will therefore only add some few remarks as to how philosophy, such as conceived of by Plato, is likely to affect the life of the philosopher, and what repercussions it is likely to have on his character.

In the *Republic*, Plato advances a theory, according to which there are three human lives, the pleasure-seeking life, the life of ambition, and the philosophical life; and from what he says, it appears to have been his conviction that the first two of these lives must be conquered if the third is to become a reality.¹ This does not imply, of course, that Plato was of opinion that the desire in man for earthly happiness and for

¹ It is noteworthy that Spinoza, who was probably the greatest philosophical character in modern times, came to very similar conclusions, when he says (*De emendatione intellectus*, p. 3; ed. van Vloten et Land) that the hindrances to philosophy "ad haec tria rediguntur, divitias scilicet, honorem, atque libidinem".

fame could be subdued to such an extent as to constitute no longer any temptation,—he was too keen an observer of the human heart to be deluded on this point,—but he was obviously persuaded that a man could become so deeply rooted in his love for wisdom that these desires would not, any longer, strongly appeal to him. And in this, I believe, he is right. It seems to me, moreover, that this doctrine of the three lives gives us a key to the understanding of many features of the philosophical vocation, so that I would propose to set it forth at some greater detail.

That the philosophical profession is incompatible, first, with a pleasure-seeking disposition is, as far as I can see, quite evident. For, if philosophy consists essentially, as we have pointed out, in a lifelong devotion to the Idea of Truth, then there could scarcely be anything more at variance with the character of a true philosopher than the anxiety for having, as the phrase goes, “a good time”. On the contrary, it would appear, that the philosopher has to strive systematically to free himself from these cares, and to learn to regard both pleasure and pain as being of no paramount importance. “Each pleasure and pain”, says Plato in the *Phaedo*,¹

¹ 83 D. E., with slight omissions.

"is a sort of nail which nails and rivets the soul to the body, until she becomes like the body, and believes that to be true which the body affirms to be true; and from agreeing with the body and having the same delights she is obliged to have the same habits and haunts . . . and so she . . . has . . . no part in the communion of the divine and pure and simple". Nor are philosophical studies reconcilable with laziness. For "night and day", as we read in the *Laws*,¹ "are not long enough for the accomplishment of their perfection and consummation; and therefore to this end all freemen ought to arrange the way in which they will spend their time during the whole course of the day, from morning till evening and from evening till the morning of the next sunrise". In the Seventh Epistle, moreover, Plato tells us that there is a sort of "royal test", by which we can find out in the shortest time whether a young man is fit for philosophy or not. "It is requisite", he says there,² "to show that philosophy is a thing of the greatest consequence, and that it is only to be obtained by great study and mighty labour. For he who hears that this is the case, if he is

¹ 807 D, E.

² 340 B, C. The translation is taken from Sydenham and Taylor's complete edition of Plato's works in English.

truly a lover of wisdom, and is adapted to and worthy of its acquisition . . . will think that he hears of an admirable way, that he ought immediately to betake himself to this path, and make it the great business of his life. After this, he will not cease exciting both himself and the leader of this way, till he either obtains the consummation of his wishes, or receives a power by which he may be able to conduct himself without a guide." And so great is his enthusiasm for wisdom said to be that henceforth he "will so live, that all his actions may accord with these conceptions".¹ He "will daily procure for himself such nutriment, as may especially render him docile, of a good memory, and able to reason; living soberly, and hating intoxication."² From Plutarch we learn that "those who were entertained at dinner by Plato felt well also on the following day".³ And so I believe that Dr. Inge is perfectly right, when he writes:⁴ "The Platonist who is not an ascetic is a dilettante; but it is the mind, rather than the flesh, which he subjects to stern discipline. Plain living,⁵

¹ *Ib.* 340 D.

² *Ib.*

³ *De tuenda sanitate*, cap. 9: ὡς οἱ παρὰ Πλάτωνι δειπνήσαντες καὶ εἰς αὔριον ἡδέως γίνονται.

⁴ *The Platonic Tradition in English Religious Thought*, p. 72 sq.

⁵ The famous Δωριωτὶ ζῆν. Cf. *Ep.* vii. 336 E.

rather than mortification, is generally his rule in daily life."

Nevertheless, it is scarcely the lure of pleasure that is the great enemy of the Platonic philosopher. Much more difficult for him is, it seems to me, the conquest of ambition. For, since without a keen sense of honour and without lofty aspirations no good philosophical work can be achieved, he is not allowed to weaken by a consistent training those instincts that would push him in this direction. On the contrary, he must suffer them to remain strong. Accordingly it is to be expected that a much fiercer battle is awaiting him in the field of honour, than in that of pleasure, where his natural propensities probably will soon have become comparatively weak and inoffensive.

And yet, in one respect it would seem as if it could not be at all hard for him to lay aside even his ambitions. For no philosopher, who has seriously meditated on his profession, can be very eager after the applause and approbation of the larger public. He must be fully aware that what we call fashionable society is no competent judge in philosophical matters. A crowd, says Plato, is incapable of being either very good or very bad; "whatever they do is the result of chance".¹

¹ *Crito* 44 D.

Nor can a philosopher feel much attracted by the noise with which almost all public affairs are transacted. He loves a quiet retirement for doing solid work, but he loathes those places where it is apparently forgotten that, as Benjamin Whichcote says,¹ "the longest sword, the strongest lungs, the most voices, are false measures of truth". Moreover, he is not even sure whether he ought to be much pleased if great honours were conferred on him; for, although he would naturally rejoice at perceiving that his endeavour is appreciated and publicly encouraged, yet would he not be without doubts whether it could be advantageous for his work if he were to be kept too much in the limelight.

But, although the Platonic philosopher cannot be said to be ambitious in the ordinary sense of the word, he nevertheless does not remain unperturbed when he sees, which happens not infrequently, that his readiness to serve the public welfare is questioned, or when he thinks he has reasons to believe that he does not get the recognition that is his due. It is in this field that the painful experiences of the philosopher will be found. Indeed, he has to familiarize himself with the prospect that his intentions will very

¹ *Aphorisms.*

often be greatly misconstrued, and that, as Epictetus says, "he will be laughed at by the man in the street, and get less everywhere, be it in emoluments from the public purse, or in honours, or in legal rights".¹ This disadvantage is due, I think, to various causes. One of them is probably this, that philosophers, if they are to keep faithful to their profession, are incapable of making those compromises with the world which would open to them a comparatively smooth and easy career, but rather must be prepared to sacrifice so-called "opportunities" and sometimes to do things that they know will be for them a downright setback. Secondly, if they are not allowed to do their work, as it has been well put, "for either food or fame",² if, in other words, they must not adopt for themselves the maxim that "it is better for them to get bread by the many than reputation by the few",³ then they are wanting in those stimuli which would make for self-assertion in the competitive scramble for an assured position and influence in the world. And lastly, if they see that in holding a public position they are in a constant

¹ *Diss.* iii. 15. 11: ὑπὸ τῶν ἀπαντῶντων καταγελασθῆναι, ἐν παντὶ ἔλασσον ἔχειν, ἐν ἀρχῇ, ἐν τιμῇ, ἐν δίκῃ. Cf. *Republic* 343 D. E.

² "Vel fami, vel famae."

³ Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, i. cap. xlvi. Jervas' translation.

danger of being requested to do things which would bring them into a collision with their obligation towards philosophy, as understood by them, a danger that is not at all negligible with Platonists, then it is comprehensible that they would prefer not to go in for any public career whatsoever, were it not for getting a platform in organized society from which they might hope to spread their ideas.¹

These, then, I believe, are the main troubles concerning his personal and professional honour by which the philosopher is occasionally agitated. But with this we have not touched yet upon the greatest hardship of his profession. What probably grieves him far more than all that is that he sometimes must also disappoint his friends and intimate acquaintances. For even they cannot be expected always to understand why he does not provide better for his success in life, and especially why he does not stand up with greater

¹ I have taken it as a matter of course throughout all these arguments that the Platonist does not try to pursue his work in order to make his livelihood; for this, I have no doubt, would be impossible. If, namely, Platonic philosophy means the unconditional surrender to the Idea of Truth, then it is obvious that it cannot be used as a means to a temporal end. Therefore, should a Platonist not be in a position to live on his own means, he would turn, following the example of Spinoza, I am sure, to any other lawful expedient for earning his living rather than bring his philosophy, as it were, like a merchandise to the market-place.

resolution for his personal rights in society. And so his path becomes sometimes very solitary indeed. It is in these moments that he has to stand the real test of his calling. For then he would have the impression that he is confronted with almost overwhelming odds and apparently left to cope with them alone. Simultaneously it would seem to him that it is a superhuman task to be ready at all times to unlearn what he has learnt, and to have an open mind to all questions whatsoever. It is as if there were a voice within him that would whisper:

My hopes no more must change their name;
I long for a repose that ever is the same.¹

And so he cannot help feeling tired. I say on purpose "tired", and not, for instance, "disheartened"; for if he is a philosopher, he does not even then lose his head. He calculates that such stormy periods are necessary for his spiritual life: they cause him to strike his roots deeper, and thus render later growth possible. Moreover, he reflects that one such tempest successfully weathered will help him to stand firmer and more confident in the next, until the time arrives when these experiences lose their fearful aspect altogether, and only stir within

¹ Wordsworth, "Ode to Duty".

him a kind of awe and of admiring stupor before the unmeasurable potentialities of human existence. Nevertheless, in spite of these mitigating factors, it would not be correct to say that the philosopher's life is spent in continuous sunshine, and not occasionally overshadowed as well by dark clouds.

But in the main, I trust, it is true to affirm that the philosopher is of a bright and cheerful disposition. He "is serene", says Plotinus,¹ "and has a quiet and lovable temper, which none of the so-called evils can disturb, if, that is, he is one of the right kind". And no wonder. For in a way he knows that he has chosen for himself the best part in life.² He sees that every deviation from his path could not mean but a step towards a lesser degree of truth and reality, or, what amounts to the same, a step towards illusion and, finally, towards the void. Moreover, he has a fixed purpose in life and so is free from all those anxieties which arise from a cal-

¹ *Enn.* i. 4. 12: ἤλως δὲ ὁ σπουδαῖος ἀεὶ καὶ κατὰστασις ἡσυχος καὶ ἀγαπητὴ ἢ διάθεσις ἣν οὐδὲν τῶν λεγομένων κακῶν παρακινεῖ, εἴπερ σπουδαῖος.

² I say explicitly "in a way"; for the statement is valid only from the theoretical point of view. From the practical, artistic, or religious standpoint, the same claims could be raised in behalf of the true philanthropist, artist, and priest respectively.

culation of alleged missed opportunities; and he is exempted from that feeling of a pretended "futility of life" from which so many of his fellow-men seem to suffer. In addition to this, he has the pleasant conviction that his work is a real contribution to the welfare of all. For although he cannot claim for himself the advantage of being able to bring help to particular men in acute distress like the philanthropist, nor point to certain works of art as to his visible achievements like the artist, he is nevertheless persuaded that he, too, stands for a "walk of life"¹ that mankind could ill afford not to have represented among them. Namely when he insists in all places, as it were in the capacity of a public character, on reasonable persuasion as against brute force,² then, obviously, he is strengthening those efforts that make for friendship and fellowship among men, and that are opposed to all those attempts that would bring human civilization back to the state of barbarism. And so it is not astonishing that, in the depth of his heart, the philosopher, in spite of the many obstacles that he finds on his way, is content and happy.

¹ Cf. *Republic* 600 B.

² It may be noticed that I say "brute force" or force divorced from clearly perceived moral ends, and not merely "force"; for that we could dispense with force in our world altogether seems to me entirely Utopian.

To the outside observer, this mental equipoise of the philosopher shows itself, I believe, mainly in two ways. First, in the phenomenon that the philosopher is never in a hurry, but has apparently always time to spare. This is the famous "leisure" or *σχολή*, which Plato recommends in so glowing terms in the *Theaetetus*, and which he says "a freeman can always command".¹ It is scarcely necessary to say that this seemingly easy attitude must not be mistaken for a sign of indolence; in fact it is anything other than that. If viewed more closely, it will reveal itself as the result of a stern discipline, and as attributable to the interplay of various causes of which none could be said to pander to laziness. Of these causes, I would say, the first is that the philosopher is concerned chiefly with the Idea of Truth; and truth, as we all know quite well, is never anxious to assert itself hastily in the affairs of our world; it always retains its dignity by showing that it can wait. Again, another cause may be found in the comparative detachment of the philosopher from all things temporal, which in its turn is a consequence of the concentration of his attention to a super-temporal aim. But again, if the philosopher is thus constantly, as it were, to some extent "above the

world", yet he is obliged to go into any question that is asked of him, since he *might* learn from any of them something that is of the greatest importance for him and his work, and since he can never know beforehand whether he will or not. And lastly it would appear that this quiet assurance of the philosopher can be traced back to his conviction that nothing in this world can do serious harm to a sincere seeker after truth. The worst that can happen to him is that he has to give up one of his former theories. But this is only a temporal inconvenience, which, besides, is never imposed on him except when he is called upon to exchange something that is good for something that is better. In view of all these facts it seems to me, therefore, very suggestive, when the late Professor Stenzel calls to our remembrance that the Greek word *σχολή* or "leisure" has become the Latin term "*schola*", which means discipline, and when he insists that this transition is not in the last resort due to the influence of Plato;¹ indeed I believe that Plato's method could hardly be better characterized than in the description a "disciplined leisure". It is true that this procedure is comparatively slow; but since it does not lead to artificially construed metaphysical systems, but rather to a

¹ See *Platon, der Erzieher*, p. 63.

living thought which grows together with the philosopher, and which is duly assimilated by him and so becomes "genuine" in the deep and original sense of the word, it is obviously still the best way on which the human mind can approach truth.

And so, if the true philosopher is always "at leisure", it may be said of him as well that he is always tolerant. Here again, I think, it is hardly requisite for me to point out that his tolerance has nothing to do with indifference. For, whereas tolerance always presupposes a deep conviction, indifference would betray nothing but the absence of any faith worth mentioning; and of this failure, I trust, it would not be easy to convict the Platonic philosopher.—On the other hand, it is not difficult to perceive why he shows a great deal of forbearance: he would undo his own work if he were to act otherwise. For if it is his aim to promote truth by no other means than by reasonable persuasion, because he sees that inculcated in any other way it would, at the most, be paid lip service, or grudgingly submitted to, but not readily accepted so as no longer to need any defender in the future, then he cannot but regard any attempt to impose a doctrine, however true, by coercion, in spite of its apparent successes for the moment, as being

in the long run a failure. In addition to this methodical restraint, the Platonist is conscious of the fact that he himself, strictly speaking, does not know, but that he is, like everybody else, still a learner. "I am one of those", we are told by Socrates,¹ "who are very willing to refute any one else who says what is not true, and quite as ready to be refuted as to refute; for I hold that this is the greater gain of the two, just as the gain is greater of being cured of a very great evil than of curing another." And, finally, we may recall to our minds the well-established experience that those who are convinced of being fundamentally in the right do seldom show much anxiety as to whether other people believe them to be so or not, because there is nothing that hinders them to get reconciled to the idea of other men disagreeing with them.² Therefore, as Socrates says,³ whereas the man who is not sure of his beliefs himself "seeks to convince his hearers that what he says is true", in order that there be other men who are in the same boat with him, "I am rather seeking to convince

¹ *Gorg.* 458 A.

² As Professor Häberlin says (*Das Wesen der Philosophie*, p. 125): "Je mehr Philosophie Philosophie ist, desto weniger braucht sie Recht haben zu wollen, weil sie um so mehr Wahrheit hat".

³ *Phaedo* 91 A.

myself; to convince my hearers is a secondary matter with me".¹

In one respect, however, it would appear as if the Platonist discarded this rule of tolerance: in his sharp condemnation of the doctrines of his colleagues and fellow-workers in philosophy. But even here, I would say, this is only so in appearance. For, if it is true that the Platonist does not spare the theories of other philosophers, it must not be forgotten that tolerance always applies to persons, and never to doctrines. If therefore the Platonist has reason to believe that a certain theory is wrong, he has to reject and to denounce it with the same energy as every other thinker who takes his own opinions seriously. He is justified, consequently, in not recognizing as equals those who indeed call

¹ Cicero understood Plato well in this matter. He writes (*Tusc.* ii. 2. 5): "Et refellere sine pertinacia et refelli sine iracundia parati sumus"; and (*De Divin.* ii. 72, 150): "Quum autem proprium sit Academiae, iudicium suum nullum interponere, ea probare quae simillima veri videantur, conferre causas et, quid in quamque sententiam dici potest, expromere, nulla adhibita sua auctoritate iudicium audientium relinquere integrum ac liberum, tenebimus hanc consuetudinem a Socrate traditam". Nathanael Culverwel coined the phrase (see Campagnac, *The Cambridge Platonists*, p. 306) that "Dictatoria potestas is not to be allowed in the Commonwealth of Learning". And, finally, we find the same idea also in the New Testament, where we read 1 Peter v. 2, 3): "Feed the flock of God . . . not by constraint . . . neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock".

themselves philosophers, but are not willing to follow the steep and narrow "walk of life", as initiated by Plato and to conform to the rules of conduct as would be required for doing so. He is still more justified in refusing to fraternize with those who do not show any philosophical responsibility at all, but rather would only add weight to their whims and fancies by clothing them in the technical language of the philosophers, and of whom Cicero confesses that "there is scarcely anything so absurd in the world that it might not have been supported by one of them."¹ Nor can he be reprehended if he does not always stand idly by, but sometimes takes measures to stop, if possible, the activity of those people. For, after all, these are the persons who, according to Plato, seeing that philosophy "has no kinsmen to be her protectors, enter in and dishonour her, and fasten upon her the reproaches"² that are, so to speak, on everybody's lips. But, for all that, it would be erroneous to assume that the Platonist bears them a personal grudge. He knows that in philosophy, as everywhere else, *ναρθηκοφόροι μὲν πολλοί, βάκχοι δέ τε παῦροι*,³ that is, that "many

¹ *De Divin.* ii. 58, 119: "Sed nescio quomodo, nihil tam absurde dici potest, quod non dicatur ab aliquo philosophorum".

² *Republic* 495 C.

³ *Phaedo* 69 C, D.

are called, but few are chosen",¹ and that, everyone not having received the same number of talents, it would not be just to demand of all the same amount of achievement. Therefore "there is no need", as Plato writes,² "to be angry at this ambition of theirs—which may be forgiven; for every man ought to be loved who says and manfully pursues and works out anything which is at all like wisdom: at the same time we shall do well to see them as they really are".

And so there remains for me only to add a few words regarding the method by which the philosopher can hope to propagate his message and to further his aims. In the main, I think, the answer to this question has already been given in the previous chapter of this study. But there is one point that has always baffled the expositors of Plato's philosophy, and that seems to me still to deserve special reference: I mean his disparaging judgement on the value of the written word. "Books", he writes,³ "are tiresome company, having the show of wisdom without the reality." "You would imagine that they had intelligence, but if you want to know anything and put a question to one of them, the speaker

¹ St Matthew xxii. 14.

² *Euthyd.* 306 C, D.

³ *Phaedrus* 275 B.

always gives one unvarying answer. And when they have been once written down, they are tumbled about anywhere among those who may or may not understand them, and know not to whom they should reply, to whom not: and, if they are maltreated or abused, they have no parent to protect them; and they cannot protect or defend themselves."¹ "Wherefore every worthy man will beware with all caution of bringing worthy matters into the range of human rivalry and perplexity by writing them. In one word, one must learn from what has been said that when one sees written compositions by an author, whether laws written by a legislator, or writings of any other kind soever, these were not the matters the writer deemed worthiest, if indeed he is himself a man of worth; such things are laid up in the fairest place the man possesses. If he indeed committed them to writing as things of greatest worth and moment, 'why, then, thereafter,' not gods but men 'bereft him of his wits.'"²

It is noteworthy that Bishop Butler has come to very much the same conclusions. He writes:³ "I have often wished that it had been the custom

¹ *Ib.* 275 D, E.

² *Ep.* vii. 344 C, D. The translation is Professor A. E. Taylor's.

³ *Fifteen Sermons*, Preface, § 1.

to lay before people nothing in matters of argument but premises, and leave them to draw conclusions themselves; which, though it could not be done in all cases, might in many". It looks as if both thinkers had been apprehensive lest, by the written word, the impression might be conveyed to the reader that truth was a ready-made thing that could be taken over without any effort of his own. And in that fear they are not wholly mistaken. Moreover, if truth can only be found in a whole human life, then there can be no doubt but that books are inadequate teachers. What is required is nothing less than the living personal example. Philosophy, we read in the Seventh Epistle of Plato, that philosophical Song of Songs, "is not 'exponible' in speech, like other branches of study";¹ but "it is only in consequence of a reciprocal friction of them all, names, discourses, visual and other perceptions, with one another and the testing of them by kindly examination, and question and answer practised in no spirit of vainglory, that the light of sound judgement and understanding flashes out on the various problems with all the intensity permitted to human nature".² This, to be sure, is no facile

¹ 341 C. The translation in this as well as in the two following quotations is again Professor Taylor's.

² *Ib.* 344 B.

method of teaching; but its results are solid and lasting. For, if it is applied perseveringly enough, then "a light is kindled in one soul by the fire bursting forth from the other, and, once kindled, thereafter sustains itself".¹

Naturally, it would not be reasonable for the Platonist to expect that there will be many who eventually respond to this appeal for the Platonic mode of life. The difficulties that are encountered on this path are probably too great for that. Yet there is no reason why he should not hope that there will always be at least some few to whom the price that must be paid for its beauty does not seem to be excessive. And that, he may trust, is enough. "For", says Plato, "he who judges those things to be impossible which subsist in the souls of two persons, and which from reasoning will readily be found to be the best of things, is by no means wise."²

¹ *Ib.* 341 C, D.

² *Ep.* viii. 357 B (Sydenham and Taylor).

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